

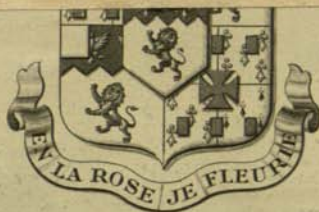
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INDIAN IDYLLS.





τῶν δ' ὃς τις λωτοῖο φάγῃ μελιηδέα καρπὸν,  
 εὐχέσθ' ἀπαγγέλλαι πάλιν ἤθελεν εὐδὲ νῆσθαι,  
 ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ βούλονται μετ' αἰδοῖσθαι Λωτοφάγους  
 λωτὸν ἐρεπτόμενοι μισῆμεν νόστου τι λαδίσθαι.

—*Od.* ix. 94.

"Whoso has tasted the honey-sweet fruit from the stems of the lotus,  
 Nevermore wishes to leave it, and never once longs to go homeward;  
 There would he stay if he could, content, with the eaters of lotus,  
 Plucking and eating the lotus, forgetting that he was returning."

—ARNOLD's *Poets of Greece*

# INDIAN IDYLLS

From the Sanskrit

OF THE

MAHÂBHÂRATA

BY

EDWIN ARNOLD, C.S.I.

AUTHOR OF

"THE LIGHT OF ASIA," ETC.

Sa8Km

Arn

2782

LONDON

TRÜBNER & CO., LUDGATE HILL

1883

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TO

THE REV. W. H. CHANNING,

WHOSE VIRTUES AND LEARNING ADD HONOUR TO A NAME

ALREADY RENDERED ILLUSTRIOUS.

W. H. Channing



## PREFACE.

---

SOMETIME ago I wrote and published, in a paper entitled "The Iliad and Odyssey of India," the following passages :—"There exist two colossal, two unparalleled epic poems in the sacred language of India—the Mahâbhârata and the Râmâyana—which were not known to Europe, even by name, till Sir William Jones announced their existence ; and one of which (the larger) since his time has been made public only by fragments, by mere specimens, bearing to those vast treasures of Sanskrit literature such small proportion as cabinet samples of ore have to the riches of a silver mine. Yet these most remarkable poems contain almost all the history of

ancient India, so far as it can be recovered ; together with such inexhaustible details of its political, social, and religious life, that the antique Hindoo world really stands epitomised in them. The Old Testament is not more interwoven with the Jewish race, nor the New Testament with the civilization of Christendom, nor the Koran with the records and destinies of Islam, than these two Sanskrit poems with that unchanging and teeming population which Her Majesty rules as Empress of Hindostan. The stories, songs, and ballads ; the histories and genealogies ; the nursery tales and religious discourses ; the art, the learning, the philosophy, the creeds, the moralities, the modes of thought, the very phrases, sayings, turns of expression, and daily ideas of the Hindoo people, are taken from these poems. Their children and their wives are named out of them ; so are their cities, temples, streets, and cattle. They have constituted the library, the newspaper, and the Bible, generation after generation, for all the



succeeding and countless millions of Hindoo people; and it replaces patriotism with that race and stands in stead of nationality to possess these two precious and inexhaustible books, and to drink from them as from mighty and overflowing rivers. The value ascribed in Hindostan to these two little-known epics has transcended all literary standards established here. They are personified, worshipped, and cited as being something divine. To read or even listen to them is thought by the devout Hindoo sufficiently meritorious to bring prosperity to his household here and happiness in the next world. They are held also to give wealth to the poor, health to the sick, wisdom to the ignorant; and the recitation of certain parvas and shlokes in them can fill the household of the barren, it is believed, with children. A concluding passage of the great poem says—

‘The reading of this Mahā-Bhārata destroys all sin and produces virtue; so much so, that the pronounciation of a single shloka is sufficient to wipe away much guilt. This



Mahā-Bhārata contains the history of the gods, of the Rishis in heaven and those on earth, of the Gandharvas and the Rākhasas. It also contains the life and actions of the one God, holy, immutable, and true, who is Krishna, who is the creator and the ruler of this universe—who is seeking the welfare of his creation by means of his incomparable and indestructible power; whose actions are celebrated by all sages; who has bound human beings in a chain, of which one end is life and the other death; on whom the Rishis meditate, and a knowledge of whom imparts unalloyed happiness to their hearts, and for whose gratification and favour all the daily devotions are performed by all worshippers. If a man reads the Mahā-Bhārata and has faith in its doctrines, he is free from all sin, and ascends to heaven after his death."

The present volume contains (besides the two Parvas from my "Indian Poetry") such translations as I have from time to time made out of this prodigious epic; which is sevenfold greater in bulk than the Iliad and Odyssey taken together. The stories here extracted are new to English literature, with the exception of a few passages of the "Sāvitṛī" and the "Nala and Damayanti," which was long ago most faithfully rendered by Dean Milman, the version being published side

by side with a clear and excellent Sanskrit text edited by Professor Monier Williams, C.I.E. But that presentation of the beautiful and brilliant legend, with all its conspicuous merits, seems better adapted to aid the student than adequately to reproduce the swift march of narrative and old-world charm of the Indian tale, which I also have therefore ventured to transcribe, with all deference and gratitude to my predecessors.

I believe certain portions of the mighty Poem which here appear, and many other episodes, to be of far greater antiquity than has been ascribed to the Mahábhárata generally. Doubtless, the "two hundred and twenty thousand lines" of the entire compilation contain in many places little and large additions and corrections interpolated in Brahmanic or post-Buddhistic times; and he who ever so slightly explores this epical ocean, will indeed perceive defects, excrescences, differences, and breaks of artistic style and structure. But in the simpler and nobler

sections, the Sanskrit verse (ofttimes as musical and highly-wrought as Homer's own Greek), bears testimony, I think,—by evidence too long and recondite for citation here,—to an origin anterior to writing, anterior to Purânic theology, anterior to Homer, perhaps even to Moses.

EDWIN ARNOLD, C.S.I.

LONDON, *August* 1883.

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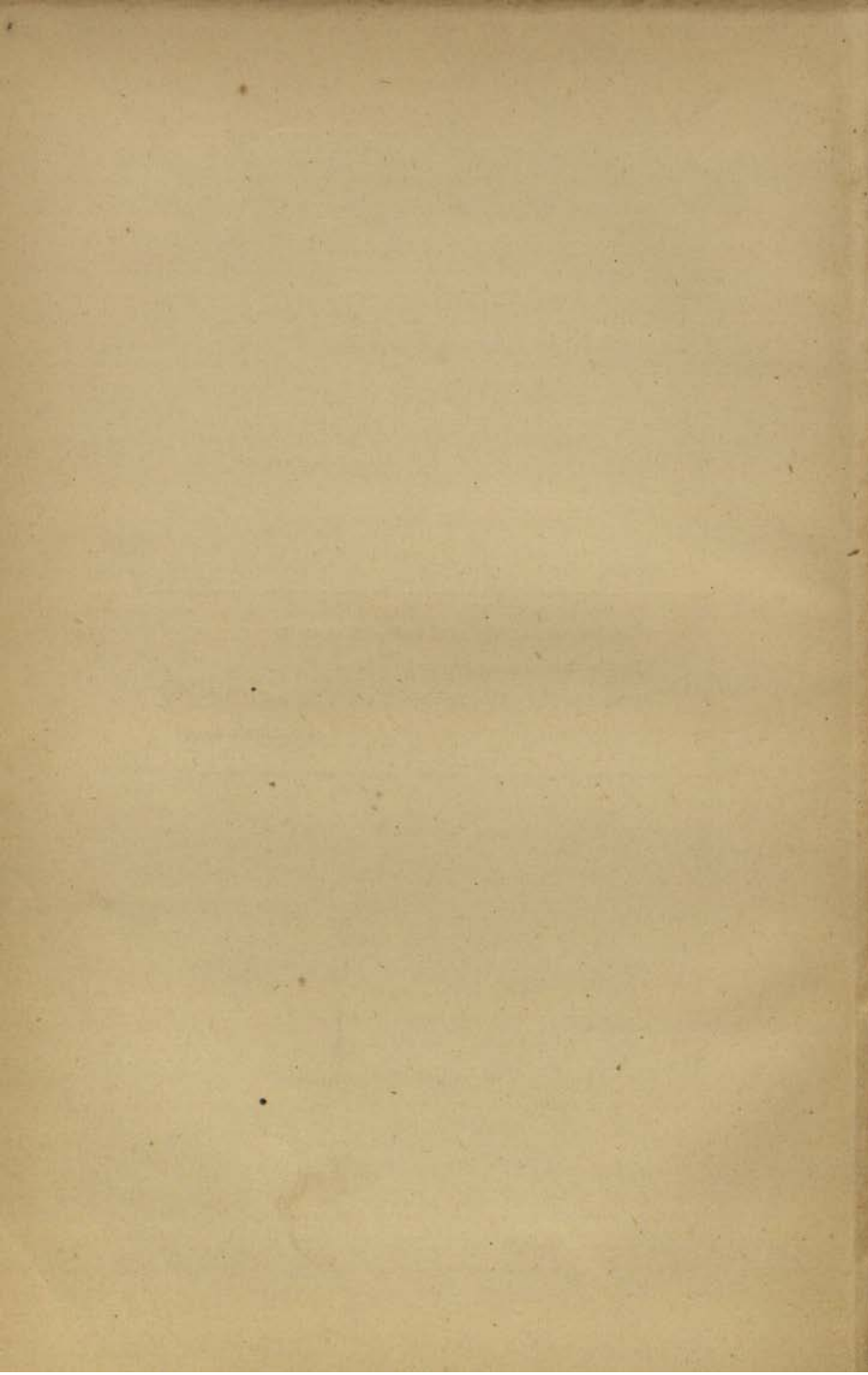
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"The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,  
But in another country—as he said—  
Bore a bright golden flower,—if not in this soil."

—MILTON'S *Comus*.





SÂVITRÎ;  
OR,  
LOVE AND DEATH.

---

[From the *Vana Parva* of the Mahâbhârata ; line 16,616,  
Calcutta 4to edition.]

“ I MOURN not for myself,” quoth Yudhisthir,  
“ Nor for my hero-brothers ; but because  
Draupadî hath been taken from us now :  
Never was seen or known another such  
As queenly, true, and faithful to her vows,  
As Draupadî.”

Then said Markandya :

“ Wilt thou hear, Prince, of such another soul,  
Wherein the nobleness of Draupadî  
Dwelt, of old days,—the Princess Sâvitri ?



THERE was a Raja, pious-minded, just—  
King of the Madras—valiant, wise, and true;  
Victorious over sense, a worshipper;  
Liberal in giving, prudent, dear alike  
To peasant and to townsman; one whose joy  
Lived in the weal of all men—Aśwapati—  
Patient, and free of any woe, he reigned,  
Save that his manhood passing, left him lone,  
A childless lord: for this he grieved; for this  
Heavy observances he underwent,  
Subduing needs of flesh, and oftentimes  
Making high sacrifice to Sâvitri;  
While, for all food, at each sixth watch he took  
A little measured dole; and this he did  
Through sixteen years (most excellent of kings!)  
Till, at the last, divinest Sâvitri  
Grew well content, and, taking shining shape,  
Rose through the flames of sacrifice and showed  
Unto that Prince her heavenly countenance.  
“Raja!” the Goddess said—the Gift-bringer—  
“Thy piety, thy purity, thy fasts,

The largesse of thy hands, thy heart's wide love,  
Thy strength of faith, have pleased me. Choose some  
boon ;

Thy dearest wish, monarch of Madra, ask ;  
It is not meet such merit go in vain."

The Raja answered : "Goddess ! for the sake  
Of children I did bear my heavy vows :  
If thou art well content, grant me, I pray,  
Fair babes, continuers of my royal line ;  
This is the boon I choose, obeying law ;  
For—say the holy seers—the first great law  
Is that a man leave seed."

The Goddess said :

"I knew thine answer, Raja, ere it came ;  
And He, the Maker of all, hath heard my word  
That this might be. The Self-existent One  
Consenteth : born there shall be unto thee  
A girl more sweet than any eyes have seen ;  
There is not found on earth so fair a maid :  
I, that rejoice in the Great Father's will,  
Know this and tell thee."

“Ah! so may it be!”

The Raja cried, once and again; and she,  
The goddess, smiled again, and vanished so;  
While Aśwapati to his palace went.  
There dwelled he, doing justice to all folk;  
Till, when the hour was good, the wise king lay  
With her that was his first and fairest wife,  
And she conceived a girl—(a girl, my liege!  
Better than many boys)—which wonder grew  
In darkness, as the moon among the stars  
Grows from a ring of silver to a round  
In the month's waxing days,—and, when time came,  
The queen a daughter bore, with lotus eyes,  
Lovely of mould. Joyous, that Raja made  
The birth-feast; and because the fair gift fell  
From Sâvitri the goddess, and because  
It was her day of sacrifice, they gave  
The name of “Sâvitri” unto the child.

In grace and beauty grew the maid, as if  
Lakshmi's own self had taken woman's form;  
And when swift years her blossomed youth made ripe,

Like to an image of dark gold she seemed,  
Gleaming, with waist so fine and breasts so deep,  
And limbs so rounded. When she moved, all eyes  
Gazed after her, as though an Apsarâ  
Had lighted out of Swarga. Not one dared,  
Of all the noblest lords, to ask for wife  
That miracle, with eyes purple and soft  
As lotus-petals, that pure perfect maid,  
Whose face shed heavenly light where she did go.

Once she had fasted, laved her head, and bowed  
Before the shrine of Agni,—as is meet,—  
And sacrificed, and spoken what is set  
Unto the Brahmans, taking at their hands  
The unconsumèd offerings, and so passed  
Into her father's presence, bright as Śri,  
If Śri were woman!—Meekly at his feet  
She laid the blossoms; meekly bent her head,  
Folded her palms, and stood, radiant with youth,  
Beside the Raja. He, beholding her  
Come to her growth, and thus divinely fair,  
Yet sued of none, was grieved at heart and spake:



"Daughter! 'tis time we wed thee; but none comes  
Asking thee; therefore thou thyself some youth  
Choose for thy lord, a virtuous prince: whoso  
Is dear to thee he shall be dear to me;  
For this the rule is by the sages taught—  
Hear what is spoken, noble maid!—'That sire  
Who giveth not his child in marriage  
Is blamable; and blamable that king  
Who weddeth not; and blamable that son,  
Who, when his father dieth, guardeth not  
His mother.' Heeding this," the Raja said,  
"Haste thee to choose; and so choose that I bear  
No guilt, dear child! before th' all-seeing gods."

Thus spake he; from the royal presence then  
Elders and ministers dismissing. She,  
Sweet Sâvitri, low-lying at his feet,  
With soft shame heard her father, and obeyed.  
Then on a bright car mounting, companioned  
By ministers and sages, Sâvitri  
Journeyed through groves and pleasant woodland towns  
Where pious princes dwelled; in every spot

Paying meet homage at the Brahmans feet;  
And so from forest unto forest passed,  
In all the Tirthas making offerings:  
Thus did the Princess visit place by place.

---

THE King of Madra sate among his lords  
With Narada beside him, counselling,  
When (Son of Bhârat!) entered Sâvitri,  
From passing through each haunt and hermitage  
Returning with those sages. At the sight  
Of Narad seated by the Raja's side  
Humbly she touched the earth before their feet  
With bended forehead.

Then spake Narada:

"Whence cometh thy fair child? and wherefore, King,  
Being so ripe in beauty, giv'st thou not  
The Princess to a husband?"

'Ev'n for that

She journeyed," quoth the Raja: "being come,

Hear for thyself, great Rishi ! what high lord  
My daughter chooseth." Then, being bid to speak  
Of Narad and the Raja, Sâvitri  
Softly said this : " In Chalva reigned a prince  
Lordly and just, Dyumutsena named,  
Blind, and his only son not come to age !  
And this sad king an enemy betrayed,  
Abusing his infirmity, whereby  
Of throne and kingdom was that king bereft ;  
And, with his queen and son, a banished man,  
He fled into the wood, and 'neath its shades  
A life of holiness doth daily lead.  
This Raja's son, born in the court, but bred  
'Midst forest peace, royal of blood, and named  
Prince Satyavân,—to him my choice is given."

" Aho ! " cried Narad ; " evil is this choice  
Which Sâvitri hath made, who, knowing not,  
Doth name the noble Satyavân her lord ;  
For noble is the Prince, sprung of a pair  
So just and faithful found in word and deed,  
The Brahmans styled him " Truth-born " at his birth.

Horses he loved, and oftentimes would mould  
 Coursers of clay, or paint them on the wall,  
 Wherefore 'Chitraśwa' was he also called."

Then spake the king: "By this he shall have grown,  
 Being of so fair birth, either a prince  
 Of valour, or a wise and patient saint!"

Quoth Narad: "Like the sun is Satyavân  
 For grace and glory; like Vrihaspati  
 For counsel; like Mahendra's self for might;  
 And hath the patience of the all-bearing earth."

"Is he a liberal giver?" asked the King;  
 "Loveth he virtue? wears he noble airs?  
 Goeth he like a prince, with sweet, proud looks?"

"He is as glad to give, if he hath store,  
 As Rantideva," Narada replied;  
 "Pious he is, and true as Shivi was,  
 The son of Usinara; fair of form  
 (Yayâti was not fairer), sweet of looks  
 (The Aświns not more gracious), gallant, kind,



Reverent, self-governed, gentle, equitable,  
Modest, and constant. Justice lives in him,  
And honour guides. Those who do love a man  
Praise him for manhood; they that seek a saint  
Laud him for purity and passions tamed."

"A prince thou showest me," the Raja said,  
"All virtues owning! tell me of some faults,  
If fault he hath."

"None lives," quoth Narada,  
"But some fault mingles with his qualities;  
And Satyavân bears that he cannot mend.  
The blot which spoils his brightness, the defect  
Forbidding yonder Prince, Raja, is this,  
'Tis fated he shall die after a year!  
Count from to-day one year, he perisheth!"

"My Sâvitri!" the King cried, "go, dear child!  
Some other husband choose. This hath one fault,  
But huge it is, and mars all nobleness:  
At the year's end he dies;—'tis Narad's word,  
Whom the gods teach!"

But Sâvitri replied :

“ Once falls a heritage ; once a maid yields  
Her maidenhood ; once doth a father say  
‘ Choose, I abide thy choice ; ’—These three things  
done

Are done for ever. Be my Prince to live  
A year or many years ; be he so great  
As Narada hath said, or less than this ;  
Once have I chosen him, and choose not twice !  
My heart resolved, my mouth hath spoken it,  
My hand shall execute :—This is my mind ! ”

Quoth Narad, “ Yea, her mind is fixed, O King !  
And none will turn her from this path of truth.  
Also the virtues of Prince Satyavân  
Shall in no other man be found. Give thou  
Thy child to him ; I gainsay not. ”

Therewith

The Raja sighed : “ Nay, that which must be, must.  
She speaketh sooth ; and I will give my child,  
Since thou our Guru art. ”

Narada said :

“Free be the gift of thy fair daughter, then !  
May happiness yet light !—Raja, I go !”

So went that sage, returning to his place ;  
And the King bade the nuptials be prepared.

---

HE bade that all things be prepared,—the robes,  
The golden cups ; and summoned priest and sage,  
Brahman, and Rity-yaj, and Purohit ;  
And on a day named fortunate set forth  
With Sâvitri. In the mid-wood they found  
Dyumutsena’s sylvan court : the King,  
Alighting, paced with slow steps to the spot  
Where sate the blind lord underneath a Sâl,  
His mat woven of Kuśa grass. Then passed  
Due salutations ; worship, as is meet ;—  
All courteously the Raja spake his name  
All courteously the blind King gave to him  
Earth, and a seat, and water in a jar ;

Then asked, "What, Maharaja! bringeth thee?"

And Aśwapati, answering, told him all;—

With eyes fixed full upon Prince Satyavân

He spake:—"This is my daughter Sâvitri;

Take her from me to be wife of thy son,

According to the law; thou knowest the law."

Dyumutsena said: "Forced from our throne,

Wood-dwellers, hermits, keeping state no more,

We follow right, and how would right be done

If this most lovely lady we should house

Here in our woods, unfitting home for her?"

Answered the Raja: "Grief and joy we know,

And what is real and seeming, she and I;

Nor fits this fear with our unshaken minds.

Deny thou not the prayer of him who bows

In friendliness before thee; put not by

His wish who comes well-minded unto thee!

Thy stateless state is noble; thou and I

Are of one rank; take then this maid of mine

To be thy daughter, since she chooses me

Thy Satyavân for son."



The blind Lord spake :

“ It was of old my wish to grow akin,  
Raja ! with thee, by marriage of our blood ;  
But ever have I answered to myself,  
‘ Nay ! for thy realm is lost ; forego this hope ! ’  
Yet now, so let it be, since so thou wilt ;  
My welcome guest thou art ; thy will is mine ! ”

Then gathered in the forest all those priests,  
And with due rites the royal houses bound  
By nuptial tie. And when the Raja saw  
His daughter, as befits a princess, wed,  
Home went he glad. And glad was Satyavân  
Winning that beauteous wife, with all gifts rich ;  
And she rejoiced to be the wife to him,  
So chosen of her soul. But when her sire  
Departed, from her neck and arms she stripped  
Jewels and gold, and o’er her radiant form  
Folded the robe of bark and yellow cloth  
Which hermits use ; and all hearts did she gain  
By gentle actions, soft self-government,  
Patience and peace. The queen had joy of her

For tender services and mindful cares ;  
The blind king took delight to know her days  
So holy and her wise words so restrained ;  
And with her lord in sweet converse she lived,  
Gracious and loving, dutiful and dear.

But while in the deep forest softly flowed  
This quiet life of love and holiness  
The swift moons sped ; and always in the heart  
Of Sâvitri by day and night there dwelt  
The words of Narada—those dreadful words !

---

NOW when the pleasant days were passed which  
brought

The day of doom, and Satyavân must die ;  
(For hour by hour the Princess counted them,  
Keeping the words of Narada in heart),  
Bethinking on the fourth noon he should die,  
She set herself to make the " Threefold Fast,"  
Three days and nights foregoing food and sleep ;  
Which when the King Dyumutsena heard,  
Sorrowful he arose and spake her thus :

“Daughter! a heavy task thou takest on ;  
Hardly the saintliest soul might such abide.”  
But Sâvitri gave answer : “Have no heed ;  
What I do set myself I will perform ;  
The vow is made, and I shall keep the vow.”  
“If it be made,” quoth he, “it must be kept ;  
We cannot bid thee break thy word, once given.”  
With that the King forbade not, and she sate  
Still, as though carved of wood, three days and nights.  
But when the third night waned, and brought the day  
Whereon her lord must die, she rose betimes,  
Made offering on the altar-flames, and sang  
Softly the morning prayers ; then, with clasped palms  
Laid o’er her bosom, meekly came to greet  
The King and Queen, and lowlily salute  
The grey-haired Brahmans. Thereupon those saints—  
Resident in the woods—made answer mild  
Unto the Princess : “Be it well with thee,  
And with thy lord, for these good deeds of thine !”  
“May it be well !” she answered ; in her heart  
Full mournfully that hour of fate awaiting  
Foretold of Narad.

Then they said to her:

"Daughter! thy vow is kept. Come now and eat."

But Sâvitri replied: "When the sun sinks

This evening, I will eat: that is my vow."

So, when they could not change her, afterward

Came Satyavân the Prince, bound for the woods,

An axe upon his shoulder; unto whom

Wistfully spake the Princess: "Dearest Lord!

Go not alone to-day; let me come, too;

I cannot be apart from thee to-day."

"Why not to-day?" quoth Satyavân. "The wood

Is strange to thee, belovéd, and its paths

Rough for thy tender feet; besides, with fast

Thy soft limbs faint; how canst thou walk with me?"

"I am not weak nor weary," she replied,

"And I can walk. Say me not nay, sweet Lord!

I have so great a heart to go with thee."

"If thou hast such good heart," answered the Prince,



"I shall say yea, but first entreat the leave  
Of those we reverence, lest a wrong be done."

So, pure and dutiful, she sought that place  
Where sat the King and Queen, and bending low,  
Murmured request: "My husband goeth straight  
To the great forest, gathering fruits and flowers:  
I pray your leave that I may be with him.  
To make the Agnihôtra sacrifice  
Fetcheth he those, and will not be gainsaid,  
But surely goeth. Let me go! A year  
Hath rolled since I did fare from the hermitage  
To see our groves in bloom. I have much will  
To see them now."

The old King gently said:

"In sooth it is a year since she was given  
To be our son's wife, and I mind me not  
Of any boon the loving heart hath asked,  
Nor any one untimely word she spake;  
Let it be as she prayeth. Go, my child!  
Have care of Satyavân, and take thy way."

So, being permitted of them both, she went,  
That beauteous lady, at her husband's side,  
With aching heart, albeit her face was bright.  
Flower-laden trees her large eyes lighted on,  
Green glades where pea-fowl sported, crystal streams,  
And soaring hills whose green sides burned with bloom,  
Which oft the Prince would bid her gaze upon;  
But she as oft turned those great eyes from them  
To look on him, her husband, who must die,  
(For always in her heart were Narad's words);  
And so she walked behind him, guarding him,  
Bethinking at what hour her lord must die;  
Her true heart torn in twain, one half to him  
Close-cleaving, one half watching if Death come.

---

THEN, having reached where woodland fruits did grow,  
They gathered those, and filled a basket full;  
And afterwards the Prince plied hard his axe  
Cutting the sacred fuel. Presently  
There crept a pang upon him, a fierce throe  
Burned through his brows, and, all a-sweat, he came  
Feebly to Sâvitri, and moaned: "O wife!

I am thus suddenly too weak for work ;  
My veins throb, Sâvitri ! my blood runs fire ;  
It is as if a threefold fork were plunged  
Into my brain. Let me lie down, fair love !  
Indeed, I cannot stand upon my feet."

Thereon, that noble lady, hastening near,  
Stayed him, that would have fallen, with quick arms ;  
And, sitting on the earth, laid her lord's head  
Tenderly in her lap. So bent she, mute,  
Fanning his face, and thinking 'twas the day—  
The hour—which Narad spake—the sure-fixed date  
Of dreadful end—when lo ! before her rose  
A shade majestic. Red his garments were,  
His body vast and dark ; like fiery suns  
The eye which burned beneath his forehead-cloth ;  
Armed was he with a noose, awful of mien.  
This Form tremendous stood by Satyavân,  
Fixing its gaze upon him. At the sight  
The fearful Princess started to her feet—  
Heedfully laying on the grass his head—  
Upstarted she with beating heart, and joined

Her palms for supplication, and spake thus  
In accents tremulous: "Thou seem'st some god!  
Thy mien is more than mortal; make me know  
What god thou art, and what thy purpose here."

And Yama said (the dreadful God of Death):  
"Thou art a faithful wife, O Sâvitri!  
True to thy vows, pious, and dutiful,  
Therefore I answer thee. Yama I am!  
This Prince, thy lord, lieth at point to die;  
Him will I straightway bind and bear from life;  
This is my office, and for this I come."

Then Sâvitri spake sadly: "It is taught  
Thy messengers are sent to fetch the dying;  
Why is it, Mightiest! thou art come thyself?"

In pity of her love, the Pitiless  
Answered—the King of all the Dead replied:  
"This was a prince unparalleled, thy lord;  
Virtuous as fair, a sea of goodly gifts,  
Not to be summoned by a meaner voice  
Than Yama's own: therefore is Yama come!"



With that the gloomy god fitted his noose,  
And forced forth from the Prince the soul of him—  
Subtile, a thumb in length—which being reft,  
Breath stayed, blood stopped, the body's grace was  
gone,

And all life's warmth to stony coldness turned.  
Then binding it, the Silent Presence bore  
Satyavân's soul away toward the south.

But Sâvitri the Princess followed him;  
Being so bold in wifely purity,  
So holy by her love, and so upheld,  
She followed him.

Presently Yama turned.  
"Go back!" quoth he, "pay him the funeral dues.  
Enough, O Sâvitri! is wrought for love;  
Go back! too far already hast thou come!"

Then Sâvitri made answer: "I must go  
Where my lord goes, or where my lord is borne;  
Nought other is my duty. Nay, I think,  
By reason of my vows, my services

Done to the Gurus, and my faultless love,  
 Grant but thy grace, I shall unhindered go.  
 The Sages teach that to walk seven steps  
 One with another maketh good men friends;  
 Beseech thee, let me say a verse to thee:

*Be master of thyself if thou wilt be  
 Servant of Duty. Such as thou shalt see  
 Not self-subduing do no deeds of good  
 In youth or age, in household or in wood.  
 But wise men know that Virtue is best bliss,  
 And all by some one way may reach to this.  
 It needs not men should pass through orders  
 four*

*To come to Knowledge: doing right is more  
 Than any learning; therefore sages say,  
 Best and most excellent is Virtue's way."*

Spake Yama then: "Return!—yet am I moved  
 By those soft words: justly their accents fell,  
 And sweet and reasonable was their sense.  
 See now, thou faultless one!—except this life



I bear away, ask any boon from me;  
It shall not be denied."

Sāvitri said:

"Let, then, the King, my husband's father, have  
His eyesight back; and be his strength restored;  
And let him live anew, strong as the sun."

"I give this gift," Yama replied; "thy wish,  
Blameless! shall be fulfilled. But now go back!  
Already art thou wearied, and our road  
Is hard and long. Turn back! lest thou too die."

The Princess answered: "Weary am I not,  
So I walk nigh my lord. Where he is borne  
Thither wend I. Most mighty of the gods!  
I follow wheresoe'er thou takest him:  
I know a verse on this, if thou wouldst hear:

*There is nought better than to be  
With noble souls in company;  
There is naught dearer than to wend  
With good friends faithful to the end.*

*This is the love whose fruit is sweet,  
Therefore to bide therein is meet."*

Spake Yama, smiling: "Beautiful! thy words  
Delight me; they are excellent, and teach  
Wisdom unto the wise, singing soft truth.  
Look now! except the life of Satyavân,  
Ask yet another—any—boon from me."

Sāvitri said: "Let, then, the pious King,  
My husband's father, who hath lost his throne,  
Have back the Rāj, and let him rule his realm  
In happy righteousness. This boon I ask."

"He shall have back the throne," Yama replied;  
"And he shall reign in righteousness: these things  
Will surely fall. But now, gaining thy wish,  
Return anon: so shalt thou 'scape much ill."

"Ah, awful god! who holdst the world in leash,"  
The Princess said, "restraining evil men,  
And leading good men—ev'n unconscious—there  
Where they attain: hear yet these famous words:

*The constant virtues of the good are tenderness and love  
To all that lives ; in earth, air, sea ; great, small,  
below, above ;*

*Compassionate of heart, they keep a gentle thought for  
each ;*

*Kind in their actions, mild in will, and pitiful of speech.  
Who pitieth not, he hath not faith ; full many an one  
so lives ;*

*But when an enemy seeks help, the good man gladly  
gives."*

"As water to the thirsting," Yama said,  
"Princess! thy words melodious are to me.  
Except the life of Satyavân thy lord,  
Ask one boon yet again, for I will grant."

Answer made Sâvitri: "The King my sire  
Hath no male child. Let him see many sons  
Begotten of his body, who may keep  
The royal line long regnant. This I ask."

"So it shall be!" the Lord of death replied ;  
"A hundred fair preservers of his race

Thy sire shall boast. But this wish being won,  
Return, dear Princess ! thou hast come too far."

"It is not far for me," quoth Sāvitrī,  
Since I am near my husband ; nay, my heart  
Is set to go as far as to the end.  
But hear these other verses, if thou wilt :

*By that sunlit name thou bearest,  
Thou, Vaivaswata ! art dearest ;  
Those that as their lord proclaim thee  
King of Righteousness do name thee ;  
Better than themselves the wise  
Trust the righteous. Each relies  
Most upon the good, and makes  
Friendship with them. Friendship takes  
Fear from hearts ; yet friends betray,  
In good men we may trust alway."*

"Sweet lady !" Yama said, "never were words  
Spoke better ; never truer heard by ear.  
Lo ! I am pleased with thee. Except this soul,  
Ask one gift yet again, and get thee home."

"I ask thee, then," quickly the Princess cried,  
"Sons, many sons, born of my body; boys,  
Satyavân's children; lovely, valiant, strong;  
Continuers of their line. Grant this, kind god."

"I grant it," Yama answered: "thou shalt bear  
Those sons thy heart desireth, valiant, strong:  
Therefore go back, that years be given thee;  
Too long a path thou treadest, dark and rough."

But, sweeter than before, the Princess sang:

*In paths of peace and virtue  
Always the good remain;  
And sorrow shall not stay with them,  
Nor long access of pain:  
At meeting or at parting  
Joys to their bosom strike,  
For good to good is friendly,  
And Virtue loves her like.  
The great sun goes his journey,  
By their strong truth impelled;  
By their pure lives and penances*



*Is earth itself upheld :  
Of all which live or shall live  
Upon its hills and fields,  
Pure hearts are the "protectors,"  
For Virtue saves and shields.*

*Never are noble spirits  
Poor while their like survive.  
True love has wealth to render,  
And Virtue gifts to give.  
Never is lost or wasted  
The goodness of the good ;  
Never against a mercy,  
Against a right it stood.  
And—seeing this—that Virtue  
Is always friend to all,  
The virtuous and true-hearted  
Men their "protectors" call.*

"Line for line, Princess ! as thou sangest so,"  
Quoth Yama, "all that lovely praise of good,  
Grateful to hallowed minds, lofty in sound,  
And couched in dulcet numbers—word by word—"



Dearer thou grew'st to me. Oh thou great heart!  
Perfect and firm! ask any boon from me—  
Ask an incomparable boon!"

She cried

Swiftly, no longer stayed: "Not heaven I crave,  
Nor heavenly joys, nor bliss incomparable,  
Hard to be granted even by thee; but *him*,  
*My sweet lord's life*, without which I am dead;  
Give me that gift of gifts! I will not take  
Aught less without him, not one boon,—no praise,  
No splendours, no rewards,—not even those sons  
Whom thou didst promise. Ah! thou wilt not now  
Bear hence the father of them, and my hope!  
Make thy free word good; give me Satyavân  
Alive once more!"

And, thereupon, the god,  
The Lord of Justice, high Vaivaswata,  
Loosened the noose and freed the Prince's soul,  
And gave it to the lady; saying this,  
With eyes grown tender: "See, thou sweetest queen  
Of women! brightest jewel of thy kind!"

Here is thy husband. He shall live, and reign  
Side by side with thee,—saved by thee,—in peace,  
And fame, and wealth, and health, many long years;  
For pious sacrifices, world-renowned.  
Boys shalt thou bear to him, as I did grant—  
Kshatriya Kings, fathers of Kings to be—  
Sustainers of thy line. Also, thy sire  
Shall see his name upheld by sons of sons  
Like the Immortals, valiant, Málavas !”

These gifts the awful Yama gave, and went  
Unto his place; but Sâvitri, made glad,  
Having her husband's soul, sped to the glade  
Where his corse lay. She saw it there, and ran,  
And sitting on the earth, lifted its head,  
And lulled it on her lap, full tenderly.  
Thereat warm life returned: the white lips moved;  
The fixed eyes brightened, gazed, and gazed again,  
As when one starts from sleep, and sees a face—  
The well-beloved's—grow clear, and smiling wakes,  
So Satyavân. “ Long have I slumbered, dear !”  
He sighed, “ why didst thou not arouse me? Where

Is gone that gloomy man that haled at me?"

Answered the Princess: "Long, indeed, thy sleep,  
Dear lord! and deep; for he that haled at thee  
Was Yama, God of Death: but he is gone;  
And thou, being rested and awake, rise now,  
If thou canst rise, for look! the night is near!"

Thus, newly living, newly waked, the Prince  
Glanced all around upon the blackening groves  
And whispered: "I came forth to pluck the fruits,  
Oh, slender-waisted! with thee: then—some pang  
Shot through my temples while I hewed the wood,  
And I lay down upon thy lap, dear wife!  
And slept. This I do well remember! Next—  
Was it a dream?—that vast, dark, mighty One  
Whom I beheld? Oh, if thou saw'st and know'st,  
Was it in fancy or in truth he came?"

Softly she answered: "Night is falling fast;  
To-morrow I will tell thee all, dear lord!  
Get to thy feet and let us seek our home.  
Gods guide us! for the gloom spreads fast around;

The creatures of the forest are abroad  
Which roam and cry by night. I hear the leaves  
Rustle with beasts that creep. I hear this way  
The yell of prowling jackals; beasts do haunt  
In the southern wood; their noises make me fear!"

"The wood is black with shadows," quoth the  
Prince;

"You would not know the path; you could not see it.  
We cannot go!"

She said: "There was to-day  
A fire within the forest, and it burned  
A withered tree; yonder the branches flame!  
I'll fetch a lighted brand and kindle wood:  
See, there is fuel here! Art thou so vexed  
Because we cannot go? Grieve not! The path  
Is hidden, and thy limbs are not yet knit.  
To-morrow, when the way grows clear, depart;  
But, if thou wilt, let us abide to-night."

And Satyavân replied: "The pains are gone  
Which racked my brow; my limbs seem strong again.

Fain would I reach our home, if thou wilt aid.  
Ever betimes I have been wont to come  
At evening to the place where those we love  
Await us. Ah! what trouble they will know,  
Father and mother, searching now for us!  
They prayed me hasten back. How they will weep  
Not seeing me! for there is none save me  
To guard them. 'Quick return,' they said; 'our  
lives

Live upon thine; thou art our eyes, our breath,  
Our hope of lineage; unto thee we look  
For funeral cakes, for mourning feasts, for all!  
What will these do alone, not seeing me  
Who am their stay? Shame on the idle sleep  
And foolish dreams which cost them all this  
pain!

I cannot tarry here! My sire, belike,  
Having no eyes, asks at this very hour  
News of me from each one that walks the wood.  
Let us depart! Not, Sâvitri, for us  
Think I, but for those reverend ones at home  
Mourning me now. If they fare well, 'tis well



With me ; if ill, naught's well ! What would please  
 them  
 Is wise and good to do."

Thereat he beat  
 Faint hands, eager to go. And Sâvitri,  
 Seeing him weeping, wiped his tears away  
 And gently spake : " If I have kept the fast,  
 Made sacrifices, given gifts, and wrought  
 Service to holy men, may this black night  
 Be bright to those and thee ! for we will go ;  
 I think I never spoke a false word once  
 In all my life, not even in jest : I pray  
 My truth may help to-night them, thee and me !"

" Let us set forth !" he cried ; " if any harm  
 Hath fallen on those so dear, I could not live ;  
 I swear it by my soul ! As thou art sweet,  
 Helpful, and virtuous, aid me to depart."

Then Sâvitri arose and tied her hair,  
 And lifted up her lord upon his feet ;  
 Who, as he swept the dry leaves from his cloth,

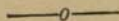


Looked on the basket full of fruit. "But thou,"  
The Princess said, "to-morrow shall bring these;  
Give me thine axe; the axe is good to take!"  
So saying, she hung the basket on a branch,  
And in her left hand carrying the axe,  
Came back, and laid his arm across her neck,  
Her right arm winding round him. So they went.

[The story concludes happily. Whilst the Prince and Princess find a path through the shades of the forest, the king, Dyumutsena, much afflicted at their absence, is suddenly restored to sight, and becomes consoled by his Rishis, who are convinced that Satyavân and Sâvitri will return safe and well. Before dawn the absent pair do, indeed, come back, and, being eagerly questioned, the Prince is unable to explain what has befallen, but Sâvitri relates it all, telling how Narada had foreseen that her husband must die, and how she had kept the "Threefold Fast" and gone with him to the wood in order to avert his doom. Whilst the Rishis are praising the virtuous Princess, and loudly declaring that her piety and courage have conquered Death himself, messengers arrive from Dyumutsena's city, announcing that the usurper has been overthrown there, and Satyavân's father re-proclaimed as king. Dyumutsena returns accordingly in triumph to his capital, with his queen, with Sâvitri, and with her husband; and all the good fortunes promised them by Yama duly befall. Markandya finishes the narrative by saying:]

So did fair Sâvitri from Yama save  
Her lord, and all his house to glory lead.  
And Draupadî, as wise and beautiful,  
Shall, like that princess (O great Yudhisthir !),  
Bring you past bitter seas to blessed shores.

Then was the Prince of Pandavas consoled;  
He also, who shall read with heart intent  
Sâvitri's holy story, will wax glad,  
And know that all fares well, and suffer not.



## NALA AND DAMAYANTÎ.

[From the *Vana Parva* of the Mahâbhârata, line 2073, Calcutta  
4to Edition.]



### PART I.

A PRINCE there was named Nala, Virasen's noble  
breed,

Goodly to see, and virtuous ; a tamer of the steed ;

As Indra 'midst the gods, so he of kings was kingliest  
one,

Sovereign of men, and splendid as the golden glittering  
sun ;

Pure ; knowing Vedas ; gallant ; ruling greatly Nis-  
hadh's lands ;

Dice-loving, but a proud, true chief of her embattled  
bands ;

By lovely ladies lauded ; free, trained in self-control ;

A shield and bow; a Manu on earth; a royal soul !

And in Vidarbha's city the Raja Bhima dwelled;  
Save offspring from his perfect bliss no blessing was  
withheld;  
For offspring many a pious rite full patiently he  
wrought,  
Till Damana the Brahman unto his house was brought;  
Him Bhima, ever reverent, did courteously entreat;  
Within the Queen's pavilion led him to rest and eat;  
Whereby that sage, grown grateful, gave her, for joy  
of joys,  
A girl, the gem of girlhood, and three brave, lusty  
boys,—  
Damana, Dama, Dânta, their names,—Damayantî she;  
No daughter more delightful, no sons could goodlier  
be !

Stately and bright and beautiful did Damayantî grow;  
No land there was which did not the slender-waisted  
know ;



A hundred slaves her fair form decked with robe and  
ornament,  
Like Śachi's self to serve her a hundred virgins bent;  
And, 'midst them, Bhima's daughter, in peerless glory  
dight,  
Gleamed as the lightning glitters against the murk of  
night,  
Having the eyes of Lakshmi, long-lidded, black, and  
bright.  
Nay, never Gods, nor Yakshas, nor mortal men  
among,  
Was one so rare and radiant e'er seen, or sued, or  
sung,  
As she, the heart-consuming, in heaven itself desired.

And Nala, too, of princes the tiger-prince, admired  
As Kama was, in beauty like the bodied Lord of  
Love:

And ofttimes Nala praised they all other chiefs above  
In Damayantī's hearing, and oftentimes to him  
With worship and with wonder her beauty they would  
limn,



So that—unmet, unknowing, unseen—in each for each  
A tender thought and longing grew up, from seed of  
speech ;

And love (thou son of Kunti!) those gentle hearts did  
reach.

---

THUS Nala, hardly bearing in his heart  
The longing, wandered in his palace-woods,  
And marked some water-birds, with painted plumes,  
Disporting. One, by stealthy steps, he seized ;  
But the sky-traveller spake to Nala this :  
“ Kill me not, Prince ! and I will serve thee well ;  
For I in Damayanti's ear will say  
Such good of Nishadh's lord, that never more  
Shall thought of man possess her, save of thee.”

Thereat the Prince gladly gave liberty  
To his soft prisoner, and all the swans  
Flew, clanging, to Vidarbha—a bright flock—  
Straight to Vidarbha, where the Princess walked ;  
And there beneath her eyes those wingèd ones

Lighted. She saw them sail to earth, and marked,  
Sitting amid her maids, their graceful forms;  
While these, for wantonness, 'gan chase the swans,  
Which fluttered this and that way, through the  
grove:

Each girl with tripping feet her bird pursued;  
And Damayanti, laughing, followed hers;  
Until, at point to grasp, the flying prey  
Deftly eluding touch, spake as men speak  
Addressing Bhima's daughter:

"Lady dear!

Loveliest Damayanti! Nala dwells  
In near Nishadha: oh, a noble prince!  
Not to be matched of men; an Aswin he  
For goodliness. Incomparable maid!  
Wert thou but wife to that surpassing chief,  
Rich would the fruit grow from such lordly birth,  
Such peerless beauty, slender-waisted one!  
Gods, men, and Gandharvas have we beheld,  
But never none among them like to him.  
As thou art Pearl of princesses, so he

Is Crown of princes ; 'happy would it fall  
One such perfection should another wed."

And when she heard that bird (O King of men !)  
The Princess answered, "Go, dear swan, and tell  
This same to Nala ;" and the egg-born said,  
"I go," and flew ; and told the Prince of all.

---

BUT Damayanti, having heard the bird,  
Lived fancy-free no more ; by Nala's side  
Her soul dwelt, while she sate at home distraught,  
Mournful and wan, sighing the hours away,  
With eyes upcast and passion-laden looks :  
So that eftsoons her limbs failed, and her mind,  
By love o'erweighted, found no rest in sleep,  
No grace in company, no joy at feasts.  
Nor night nor day brought peace : always she heaved  
Sigh upon sigh, till all her maidens knew,  
By glance and mien and moan, how changed she was,  
Her own sweet self no more : then to the king  
They told how Damayanti loved this Prince ;

Which thing when Bhima from her maidens heard,  
Deep pondering for his child what should be done,  
And why the Princess was beside herself,  
That Lord of lands perceived his daughter grown,  
And knew that for her high Swayamvara  
The time was come.

So to the Rajas all  
The King sent word: "Ye lords of earth! attend  
Of Damayanti the Swayamvara."  
And when these learned of her Swayamvara,  
Obeying Bhima, to his court they thronged,—  
Elephants, horses, cars,—over the land  
In full files wending, bearing flags and wreaths  
Of countless colours, with gay companies  
Of fighting men. And these high-hearted chiefs  
The strong-armed King welcomed with worship fair  
As fitted each, and led them to their seats.

Now, at that hour, there passed towards Indra's  
heaven,  
Thither from earth ascending, those twain saints

The wise, the pure, the mighty-minded ones,  
The self-sustained, Narad and Parvata.  
The mansion of the Sovereign of the Gods  
In honour entered they; and He, the lord  
Of clouds, dread Indra, softly them salutes,  
Enquiring of their weal, and of the world,  
Wherethrough their name is famous;—how it fares?

Then Narad said, "Well is it, Lord of gods!  
With us and with our world; and well with those  
Who rule the peoples, O thou King in heaven!"

But He that slew the demons spake again:  
"The princes of the earth, just-minded, brave,  
Those who in battle fearing not to fall,  
See death on the descending steel, and charge  
Full front against it, turning not their face;  
Theirs is this realm eternal, as to me  
The Cow of plenty, Kāmadhuk, belongs!  
Where be my Kshatriya warriors? wherefore now  
See I none coming of those slaughtered lords,  
Chiefs of mankind, our always-honoured guests?"



And unto Indra Narad gave reply :  
“ King of the air ! no wars are waged below ;  
None fall in fight to enter here. The lord  
Of high Vidarbha hath a daughter, famed  
For loveliness beyond all earthly maids,  
The Princess Damayantî, far-renowned.  
Of her, dread Sakra ! the Swayamvara  
Shall soon befall, and thither now repair  
The kings and princes of all lands to woo—  
Each for himself—this pearl of womanhood,  
For, oh, thou Slayer of the demons ! all  
Desire the maid.”

Drew round, while Narad spake,  
The Masters, th’ Immortals, pressing in  
With Agni and the greatest, near the throne,  
To listen to the speech of Narada ;  
Whom having heard, all cried delightedly,  
“ We too will go ! ” Whereupon those high Gods,  
With chariots and with heavenly retinues,  
Sped to Vidartha, where the kings were met.  
And Nala, knowing of the kingly tryst,

Went thither joyous; heart-full with the thought  
Of Damayanti.

Thus it chanced the Gods  
Beheld that prince wending along his road,  
Goodly of mien as is the Lord of Love.  
The world's Protectors saw him—like a sun  
For splendour—and in very wonder paused  
Some time irresolute; so fair he was:  
Then in mid-sky their golden chariots stayed,  
And through the clouds descending called to him:  
“Bho! Nala of Nishadha! noblest prince,  
Be herald for us; bear our message now!”

---

“YEA!” Nala made reply, “this will I do;”  
And then,—palm unto palm in reverence pressed—  
Asked: “Shining Ones! who are ye? unto whom,  
And what words bearing, will ye that I go?  
Deign to instruct me what it is ye bid.”  
Thus the Prince spake, and Indra answered him:

"Thou seest th' immortal Gods! Indra am I,  
And this is Agni, and the other here  
Varuna, Lord of Waters; and beyond,  
Yama, the King of Death, who parteth souls  
From mortal frames. To Damayantĭ go;  
Tell our approach! Say this: 'The world's dread  
Lords,  
Wishful to see thee, come; desiring thee—  
Indra, Varuna, Agni, Yama, all  
Choose of these powers to which thou wilt be given.'"  
But Nala, hearing that, joined palms again  
And cried: "Ah! send me not with one accord  
For this, most mighty Gods! How should a man  
Sue for another, being suitor too?  
How bear such errand? Have compassion, Gods!"

Then spake they: "Yet thou saidst 'This will I  
do,'

Nishadha's prince! and wilt thou do it not,  
Forswearing faith? Nay, but depart, and soon!"

So bid, but lingering yet again, he said:

"Well guarded are the gates; how shall I find  
Speech with her?"

"Thou shalt find!" Indra replied;

And, lo! upon that word Nala was brought  
To Damayanti's chamber. There he saw  
Vidarbha's glory sitting 'mid her maids,  
In majesty and grace surpassing all,  
So exquisite, so delicate of form,  
Waist so fine-turned, such limbs, such lighted eyes,  
The moon hath meaner radiance than she.  
Love, at the sight of that soft-smiling face,  
Sprang to full passion while he stood and gazed.  
Yet, faith and duty urging, he restrained  
His beating heart; but, when those beauteous maids  
Spied Nala, from their cushions they uprose,  
Startled to see a man, yet startled more  
Because he showed so heavenly bright and fair.  
In wondering pleasure each saluted him,  
Uttering no sound, but murmuring to themselves:  
"Aho! the grace of him; aho! the brilliance;  
Aho! what glorious strength lives in his limbs!

What is he? is he God, Gandharva, Yaksha?"  
But this unspoken, for they dared not breathe  
One syllable, all standing shyly there  
To see him, and to see his youth so sweet.  
Yet, softly glancing back to his soft glance,  
The Princess presently, with fluttering breath,  
Accosted Nala, saying: "Fairest prince!  
Who by that faultless form hast filled my heart  
With sudden joy, coming as come the gods,  
Unstayed, I crave to know thee, who thou art?  
How didst thou enter? how wert thou unseen?  
Our palace is close guarded, and the King  
Hath issued mandates stern."

Tenderly spake

The Prince, replying to those tender words:  
"Most lovely! I am Nala! I am come  
A herald of the gods unto thee here.  
The gods desire thee—the immortal Four—  
Indra, Varuna, Yama, Agni. Choose,  
Oh brightest! one from these to be thy lord.  
By their help is it I have entered in



Unseen; none could behold me at thy gates,  
Nor stay me passing: and to speak their will  
They sent me, fairest one and best! do thou,  
Knowing the message, judge as seemeth well."

---

SHE bowed her head, hearing the great gods named,  
And then, divinely smiling, said to him:  
"Pledge thyself faithfully to me, and I  
Will ask, O Raja! only how to pay  
That debt with all I am, with all I have;  
For I and mine are thine—in full trust thine!  
Make me this promise, Prince! Thy gentle name,  
Sung by the swan, first set my thoughts afire;  
And for thy sake,—only for thee, sweet lord—  
The kings were summoned hither. If, alas!  
Fair Prince! thou dost reject my sudden love  
So proffered, then must poison, flame, or flood,  
Or knitted cord be my sad remedy!"

So spake Vidarbha's pride, and Nala said:  
"With gods in waiting, with the world's dread lords

Hastening to woo, canst thou desire a man?  
Bethink! I unto these, that make and mar,  
These all-wise Ones, almighty, am like dust  
Under their feet. Lift thy heart to the height  
Of that I bring. If mortal man offend  
The most high gods, death is what springs of it:  
Spare me to live, thou faultless lady! choose  
Which of these excellent great gods thou wilt:  
Wear the unstained robes! bear on thy brow  
The wreaths, which never fade, of heavenly blooms!  
Be, as thou may'st, a goddess, and enjoy  
Godlike delights! Him who enfolds the earth,  
Creating and consuming, brightest god,  
Hutása, eater of the sacrifice,  
What woman would not take? Or him whose rod  
Herds all the gathered generations still  
On virtue's path, Red Yama, king of death,  
What woman would affront? Or him, the All-good,  
All-wise, destroyer of the demons, first  
In heaven, Mahendra,—who of womankind  
Is there that would not take? Or, if thy mind  
Incline, doubt not to choose Varuna: he

Is of these world-protectors. From a heart  
Full friendly cometh what I tell thee now."

Unto Nishadha's prince the maid replied,  
Tears of distress dimming her lustrous eyes:  
"Humbly I reverence these mighty gods,  
But thee I choose, and thee I take for lord,  
And this I vow!"

With folded palms she stood  
And lips a-tremble, while his answer fell:  
"Sent on such embassy, how shall I dare  
Speak, sweetest Princess! for myself to thee?  
Bound by my promise for the gods to sue,  
How can I be a suitor for myself?  
Silence is here my duty; afterwards,  
If I shall come in mine own name, I'll come  
Mine own cause pleading. Ah! might that so be!"

Checking her tears, Damayantī sadly smiled,  
And said full soft: "One way of hope I see,  
A blameless way, O Lord of men! wherefrom

No fault shall rise, nor any danger fall.  
Thou also, Prince, with Indra and these gods,  
Must enter in where my Swayamvara  
Is held; then I, in presence of those gods,  
Will choose thee, dearest! for my lord; and so  
Blame shall not be to thee."

With which sweet words  
Soft in his ears, Nishadha straight returned  
There where the Gods were gathered, waiting him;  
Whom the world's Masters on his way perceived,  
And spying, questioned, asking of his news.  
"Saw'st thou her, Prince? didst see the sweet-lipped  
one?  
What spake she of us? Tell us true! tell all!"

Quoth Nala: "By Your worshipful behest  
Sent to her house, the great gates entered I,  
Though the grey porters watched; but none might  
spy  
My entering, by Your power, O radiant Ones!  
Except the Raja's daughter; her I saw

Amidst her maidens, and by them was seen.  
On me with much amazement they did gaze  
Whilst I your high divinities extolled ;  
But she, who hath the lovely face, with mind  
Set upon me, hath chosen me, ye Gods !  
For thus she spake, my princess: ' Let them come,  
And come thou, like a lordly tiger, too,  
Unto the place of my Swayamvara ;  
There will I choose thee in their presence, Prince !  
To be my lord ; and so there will not fall  
Blame, thou strong-armed, to thee ! ' This she did say  
Even as I tell it ; and what shall be next  
To will is yours, O ye immortal Ones ! "

---

SOON, when the moon was good, and day and hour  
Were found propitious, Bhima, king of men,  
Summoned the chiefs to the Swayamvara :  
Upon which message all those eager lords  
For love of Damayanti hastened there.  
Glorious with gilded pillars was the court,  
Whereto a gate-house opened, and thereby



Into the square like lions from the hills  
Paced the proud guests ; and there their seats they took,  
Each in his rank, the masters of the lands,  
With crowns of fragrant blossoms garlanded,  
And polished jewels swinging in their ears.  
Of some the thews, knitted and rough, stood forth  
Like iron maces ; some had slender limbs,  
Sleek and fine-turned, like the five-headed snake ;  
Lords with long-flowing hair, glittering lords,  
High-nosed, and eagle-eyed, and heavy-browed ;  
The faces of those kings shone in a ring  
As shine at night the stars ; and that great square  
As thronged with Rajas was as Naga-land  
Is full of serpents, thick with warlike chiefs  
As mountain caves with panthers. Unto these  
Entered in matchless majesty of form  
The Princess Damayanti. As she came,  
The glory of her ravished eyes and hearts,  
So that the gaze of all those haughty kings  
Fastening upon her loveliness, grew fixed—  
Not moving save with her—step after step,  
Onward and always following the maid.

But while the styles and dignities of all  
Were cried aloud (O Son of Bhārat!), lo!  
The Princess marked five in that throng alike  
In form and garb and visage. There they stood  
Each from the next undifferenced, and each  
Nala's own self;—yet which might Nala be  
In nowise could that doubting maid descry;  
Who took her eye seemed Nala while she gazed,  
Until she looked upon his like, and so  
Pondered the lovely lady, sore perplexed,  
Thinking, "How shall I tell which be the gods  
And which is noble Nala?" Deep distressed  
And meditative waxed she, seeking hard  
What those signs were, delivered us of old,  
Whereby gods may be known. "Of all those signs  
Taught by our elders, lo! I see not one,  
Where stand yon five,"—so murmured she, and turned  
Over and over every mark she knew.  
At last, resolved to make the gods themselves  
Her help at need, with reverent heart and voice  
Humbly saluted she those heavenly Ones,  
And with joined palms and trembling accents spake:

"As when, hearing the swans, I chose my Prince,  
By that sincerity I call the gods  
To show my love to me and make him known!  
As in my heart, and soul, and speech I stand  
True to my choice, by that sincerity  
I call the all-knowing gods to make me know!  
As the high gods created Nishadh's chief  
To be my lord, by their sincerity  
I bid them show themselves and make me know!  
As my vow, sealed to him, must be maintained  
For his name and for mine, I call the gods  
By this sincerity to make me know!  
Let them appear, the Masters of the worlds,  
The high Gods, each one in his proper shape,  
That I may see Nishadha's chief, my choice,  
Whom minstrels praise and Damayantī loves."

Hearing that earnest speech, so passion-fraught,  
So full of truth, of strong resolve, of love,  
Of singleness of soul and constancy,—  
Even as she spake the Gods disclosed themselves:  
By well-seen signs the effulgent Ones she knew.

*Shadowless* stood they ; with *unwinking* eyes,  
And skins *which never moist with sweat* ; their feet  
Light gliding o'er the ground, *not touching it* ;  
The *unfading* blossoms on their brows *not soiled*  
By earthly dust, but *ever fair and fresh* ;  
Whilst by their side, garbed so and visaged so,  
But doubled by his shadow, stained with dust,  
The flower-cups wilting in his wreath, his skin  
Pearly with sweat, his feet upon the earth,  
And eyes awink, stood Nala. One by one  
Glanced she on those Divinities, then bent  
Her gaze upon the Prince, and, joyous, said,  
" I know thee, and I name my rightful lord,  
Taking Nishadha's chief ! " Therewith she drew  
Modestly nigh, and held him by the cloth,  
With large eyes beaming love, and round his neck  
Hung the bright chaplet, love's delicious crown ;  
So choosing him, him only, whom she named  
Before the face of all to be her lord.

Ah !—then brake forth from all those suitors proud,  
" *Ha !* " and " *Aho !* " but from the Gods and saints

"*Sādhu!* well done! well done!" and all admired  
The happy Prince, praising the grace of him;  
While Virasena's son, delightedly,  
Spake to the slender-waisted these fond words:  
"Fair Princess! since, before all Gods and men,  
Thou makest me thy choice, right glad am I  
Of this thy will, and true lord will I be.  
For so long, loveliest! as my breath endures  
Thine am I! thus I plight my troth to thee!"  
So, with joined palms, unto that beauteous maid  
His gentle faith he pledged, rejoicing her;  
And hand in hand, radiant with mutual love,  
Before great Agni and the Gods they passed,  
The world's Protectors worshipping.

Then those  
The Lords of life, the powerful Ones, bestowed,  
Being well pleased, on Nala, chosen so,  
Eight noble boons. The boon which Indra gave  
Was grace, at times of sacrifice, to see  
The visible god approach with step divine;  
And Agni's boon was this, that he would come



Whenever Nala called ; for everywhere  
Hutāśa shineth, and all worlds are his.  
Yama gave skill in cookery, steadfastness  
In virtue ; and Varuna, king of floods,  
Bade all the waters ripple at his word.  
These boons the high Gods doubled by the gift  
Of bright wreaths wove with magic blooms of heaven,  
And, those bestowed, ascended to their seats.  
Also with wonder and with joy returned  
The Rajas and the Maharajas all,  
Full of the marriage feast ; for Bhima made,  
In pride and pleasure, stately nuptials :  
So Damayantī and the prince were wed.

Then, having tarried as is wont, that lord,  
Nishadha's chief, took the King's leave and went  
Unto his city, bringing home with him  
His jewel of all womanhood ; with whom  
Blissful he lived, as lives by Śachi's side  
The Slayer of the Demons. Like a sun  
Shone Nala on his throne, ruling his folk  
In strength and virtue, guardian of his state.

Also the *Aśwamedha* rite he made,  
Greatest of rites, the offering of the horse,  
As did *Yayāti*; and all other acts  
Of worship; and to sages gave rich gifts.

Many sweet days of much delicious love,  
In pleasant gardens and in shadowy groves,  
Passed they together, sojourning like gods.  
And *Damayantī* bore unto her lord  
A boy named *Indrasen*, and next a girl  
Named *Indrasena*; so in happiness  
The good Prince governed, seeing all his lands  
Wealthy and well, in piety and peace.

---

NOW, at the choosing of *Nishadha*'s chief  
By *Bhima*'s daughter, when those Lords of life  
The effulgent gods departed, *Dwapara*  
They saw with *Kali* coming. *Indra* said—  
The Demon-slayer—spying them approach:  
“Whither with *Dwapara* goest thou to-day,  
O *Kali*!” And the sombre Shade replied:

"To Damayanti's high Swayamvara  
I go, to make her mine, since she hath grown  
Into my heart." But Indra, laughing, said:  
"Ended is that Swayamvara; for she  
Hath taken Raja Nala for her lord,  
Before us all." But Kali, hearing this,  
Broke into wrath—while he stood worshipping  
That hand divine—and furiously cried:  
"If she hath set a man above the gods  
To wed with him, for such sin let there fall  
Doom, rightful, swift, and terrible, on her!"  
"Nay!" answered unto him those heavenly Ones;  
"But Damayanti chose with our good-will,  
And what maid but would choose so fair a prince,  
Seeing he hath all qualities, and knows  
Virtue, and rightly practises the vows,  
And reads the four great Vedas, and what's next,  
The holy stories, whilst perpetually,  
The gods are honoured in his house with gifts?  
No hurt he does; kind to all living things;  
True of word is he; faithful, liberal, just;  
Steadfast and patient, temperate and pure;

A king of men is Nala, like the gods !  
He that would curse a prince of such a mould,  
Thou foolish Kali ! lays upon himself  
A sin to wreck himself : the curse comes back  
And sinks him in the bottomless vast gulf  
Of Narak."

Thus the Gods to Kali spake  
And mounted heavenward ; whereupon that Shade,  
Frowning, to Dwapara burst forth : " My rage  
Beareth no curb ! henceforth in Nala I  
Will dwell ; his kingdom I will make to fall ;  
His bliss with DamayantĪ I will mar ;  
And thou within the dice shalt enter straight,  
And help me, Dwapara ! to drag him down."

---

WHICH evil compact binding, those repaired—  
Kali and Dwapara—to Nala's house,  
And haunted in Nishadha, where he ruled,  
Seeking occasion 'gainst the blameless Prince.  
Long watched they : twelve years rolled e'er Kali saw

The fateful fault arrive ; Nishadha's lord,  
Easing himself, and sprinkling hands and lips  
With purifying water, passed to prayer  
His feet unwashed, offending ;—Kali straight  
Possessed the heedless Raja, entering him.

That hour there sate with Nala, Pushkara,  
His brother ; and the evil spirit hissed  
Into the ear of Pushkara, "Ehi !  
Arise and challenge Nala at the dice !  
Throw with the Prince ! it may be thou shalt win  
(Luck helping thee—and I), Nishadha's throne,  
Town, treasures, palace ; thou may'st gain them all !"  
And Pushkara, hearing Kali's evil voice,  
Made near to Nala with the dice in hand,  
(A great piece for the " Bull " and little ones  
For " Cows," and Kali hiding in the " Bull ").  
So Pushkara came to Nala's side and said :  
" Play with me, brother, at the ' Cows and Bull. ' "  
And being put off, cried mockingly, " Nay, play ! "  
Shaming the Prince, whose spirit chafed to leave  
A gage unfaced ; but when Vidarbha's pride,



The Princess—heard him, Nala started up :  
“Yea, Pushkara, I will play !” fiercely he said,  
And to the game addressed.

His gems he lost,  
Armlets, and belt, and necklet ; next the gold  
Of the palace and its vessels ; then the cars  
Yoked with swift steeds ; and last the royal robes ;  
For, cast by cast, the dice against him fell,  
Bewitched by Kali, and cast after cast  
The passion of the dice gat hold on him  
Until not one of all his faithfullest  
Could stay the madman’s hand and gamester’s heart  
Of who was named “Subduer of his Foes.”

The townsmen gathered with the ministers ;  
Unto the palace-gate they thronged (my King ?)  
To see their lord, if so they might abate  
This sickness of his soul. The charioteer  
Forth-standing from the midst, low worshipping,  
Spake thus to Damayantī : “Great Princess !  
Before thy door all the grieved city stands :

Say to our lord for us: 'Thy folk are here;  
They grieve that evil fortunes hold their liege,  
Who was so high and just.' " Then she, deject,  
Passed in, and to Nishadha's ruler said,  
Her soft voice broken and her bright eyes dimmed:  
"Raja! the people of thy town are here;  
Before our gates they gather—citizens  
And councillors—desiring speech with thee.  
In lealty they come, wilt thou be pleased  
We open to them?—wilt thou?" So she asked  
Again and yet again; but not one word  
To that sad lady with the lovely brows  
Did Nala answer, wholly swallowed up  
Of Kali and the gaming; so that those  
The citizens and councillors cried out:  
"Our lord is changed! he is not Nala now!"  
And home returned, ashamed and sorrowful;  
Whilst ceaselessly endured that foolish play  
Moon after moon—the Prince the loser still.

---

THEN Damayanti, seeing so estranged  
Her lord, the praised-in-song, the chief of men.

Watching, all self-possessed, his phantasy  
And how the gaming held him,—sad and 'feared,  
The heavy fortunes pondering of her prince,—  
Hating the fault, but to the offender kind,  
And fearing Nala should be stripped of all,  
This thing devised. Vṛihatsenâ she called,  
Her foster-nurse and faithful ministrant,  
True, skilful at all service, soft of speech,  
Kind-hearted; and she said: "Vṛihatsenâ!  
Go call the ministers to council now,  
As though 'twere Nala bade; and make them count  
What store is gone of treasure, what abides,"  
So went Vṛihatsenâ, and summoned those;  
And when they knew these things as from the Prince,  
"Truly we too shall perish!" cried they all;  
And all to Nala went; and all the town  
A second time assembling, thronged the gates:  
Which Bhima's daughter told; but not one word  
Answered the Prince; and when she saw her lord  
Put by her plea, utterly slighting it,  
Back to her chamber, full of shame, she goes,  
And there still hears the dice are falling ill,

Still hears of Nala daily losing more;  
So that again this to her nurse she spake:  
"Send to Varshneya, good Vrihatsenâ!  
Say to the charioteer—in Nala's name—  
'A great thing is to do; come thou!'" And this,  
As soon as Damayanti uttered it,  
Vrihatsenâ, by faithful servants, told  
Unto the son of Vrishni, who, being come  
At fitting time and place, heard the sweet queen  
In mournful music speak these wistful words:  
"Thou knowest how thy Raja trusted thee;  
Now he hath fallen on evil: succour him!  
The more that Pushkara conquers in the play,  
The wilder rage of gaming takes thy lord:  
The more for Pushkara the dice fall well,  
More contrary they happen to the Prince;  
Nor heeds he, as were meet, kindred or friends;  
Nay, of myself he putteth by the prayer  
Unanswered, being bewitched: for well I deem  
This is not noble-minded Nala's sin,  
But some ill spell possesseth him to shut  
His ears to me. Thou, therefore, charioteer,

Our refuge be! do what I shall command;  
My heart is dark with fear;—yea, it may hap  
Our lord will perish! wherefore, harnessing  
His chosen steeds, which fly as swift as thought,  
Take these our children in the chariot  
And drive to Kundina, delivering there  
Unto my kin the little ones, and car  
And horses. Afterwards abide thou there,  
Or elsewhere depart."

Varshneya heard

The words of Damayanti, and forthwith  
In Nala's council-hall recounted them,  
The chief men being present; who thus met,  
And, long debating, gave him leave to go.  
So with that royal pair to Bhima's town  
Drove he, and at Vidarbha rendered up,  
Together with the swift steeds and the car,  
The sweet maid Indrasena, and the Prince  
Indrasen, and made reverence to the king—  
Saddened, for sake of Nala. Afterward  
Taking his leave, unto Ayodhyā



Varshneya went, exceeding sorrowful,  
And with King Rituparna (Bhârat's Prince!)  
Took service as a charioteer.

---

THESE gone,  
The praised-of-poets, Nala, still played on,  
Till Pushkara his kingdom's wealth had won,  
And whatso was to lose beside. Thereat  
With scornful laugh mocked he that beggared Prince,  
Saying: "One other throw! once more!—yet, sooth,  
What canst thou stake? Nothing is left for thee  
Save Damayanti; all the rest is mine.  
Play we for Damayanti, if thou wilt."  
But hearing this from Pushkara, the Prince  
So in his heart by grief and shame was torn,  
No word he uttered, only glared in wrath  
Upon his mocker, upon Pushkara.  
Then, his rich robes and jewels stripping off,  
Uncovered, with one cloth, 'mid wailing friends,  
Sorrowful passed he forth, his great state gone,

His Princess with one garment following him,  
Piteous to see! And there, without the gates,  
Three nights they lay, Nishadha's King and Queen.  
Upon the fourth day Pushkara proclaimed  
Throughout the city: "Whoso yieldeth help  
To Nala dieth! let my will be known!"

So, for this bitter word of Pushkara's power  
(O Yudhisthir!) the townsmen rendered not  
Service nor love, but left them outcast there,  
Unhelped, whom all the city should have helped.  
Yet three nights longer tarried he, his drink  
The common pool, his meat such fruits and roots  
As miserable hunger plucks from earth;  
Then fled they from their walls, the Prince going first,  
The Princess following.

After grievous days,  
Pinched ever with sharp famine, Nala saw  
A flock of gold-winged birds lighting anigh,  
And to himself the famished Raja said:  
"Lo! here is food! this day we shall have store;"

Then lightly cast his cloth and covered them ;  
But these, fluttering aloft, bore up with them  
Nala's one cloth ; and hovering overhead,  
Uttered sharp-stinging words, reviling him  
Even as he stood, naked to all the airs,  
Downcast and desperate : " Thou brain-sick Prince !  
We are the Dice ; we come to ravish hence  
Thy last poor cloth ; we were not well content  
Thou should'st depart owning a garment still."  
And when he saw the Dice take wings and fly,  
Leaving him bare, to Damayantĭ spake  
This melancholy Prince : " O blameless one !  
They of whose malice I am driven forth,  
Finding no sustenance, sad, famine-gaunt—  
They whose decree forbade Nishadha's folk  
Should succour me, their Raja ; these have come—  
Demon and Dice—and, like to winged birds,  
Have borne away my cloth. To such shame fall'n,  
Such utmost woe ; wretched, demented—I  
Thy lord am still, and counsel thee for good.  
Attend ! hence be there many roads which go  
Southwards ; some pass Avanti's walls, and some

Skirt Rikshavan, the Forest of the Bears ;  
This wends to Vindhya's lofty peaks, and this  
To those green banks where quick Payoshni runs  
Seaward between her hermitages, rich  
In fruits and roots ; and yon path leadeth thee  
Unto Vidarbha, that to Kosala,  
And therefrom southward—southward—far away."

So spake he to the Princess wistfully,  
Between his words pointing along the paths  
Which she should take (O King !); but Bhima's child  
Made answer, bowed with grief, her soft voice choked  
With sobs, these piteous accents uttering :

" My heart beats quick ; my body's force is gone,  
Thinking, dear Prince ! on this which thou hast said,  
Pointing along the paths. What ! robbed of realm,  
Stripped of thy wealth, bare, famished, parched with  
thirst,

Thus shall I leave thee in the untrodden wood ?  
Ah, no ! while thou dost muse on good days fled,  
Hungry and weeping, I, in this wild waste

Will charm thy griefs away, solacing thee.  
The wisest doctors say, 'In every woe  
No better physic is than wifely love.'  
And, Nala! I will make it true to thee."

"Thou mak'st it true," he said; "thou sayest well,  
Sweet Damayanti! neither is there friend  
To sad men given better than a wife.  
I had no thought to leave thee, foolish love!  
Why didst thou fear? Alas! 'tis from myself  
That I would fly—not thee, thou faultless one."

"Yet, if," the Princess answered, "Maharaj,  
Thou hadst no thought to leave me, why by thee  
Was the way pointed to Vidarbha's walls?  
I know thou would'st not quit me, noblest Lord!  
Being thyself, but only if thy mind  
Were sore distraught; and see, thou gazest still  
Along the southward road, my dread thereby  
Increasing: thou that wert wise as the gods;  
If it be thy fixed thought, 'Twere best she went  
Unto her people'—be it so—I go;



But hand in hand with thee ; thus let us fare  
Unto Vidarbha, where the king my sire  
Will greet thee well and honour thee, and we  
Happy and safe within his gates shall dwell."

---

AS is thy father's kingdom," Nala said,  
"So too was mine ; be sure, whate'er befall,  
Never will I go thither. How, in sooth,  
Should I, who came there glorious, gladdening thee,  
Creep back, thy shame and scorn, disconsolate?"

So to sweet Damayantî spake the Prince,  
Beguiling her, whom now one cloth scarce clad,—  
For but one garb they shared ; and thus they strayed  
Hither and thither, faint for meat and drink ;  
Until a little hut they spied, and there  
Nishadha's monarch entering, sate him down  
On the bare ground, the Princess by his side—  
Vidarbha's glory—wearing that scant cloth,  
Without a mat, soiled by the dust and mire.  
At Damayantî's side he sank asleep  
Outworn, and beauteous Damayantî slept,

Spent with strange trials,—she so gently reared,  
So soft and holy! But while slumbering thus,  
No placid rest knew Nala; troubled-tossed,  
He woke, forever thinking of his realm  
Lost, lieges estranged, and all the griefs  
Of that wild wood. These on his heart came back,  
And “What if I shall do it? what, again,  
If I shall do it not?” so murmured he;  
“Would death be better, or to leave my love?  
For my sake she endures this woe, my fate  
Too fondly sharing; freed from me, her steps  
Would turn unto her people. At my side  
Sure suffering is her portion; but, apart,  
It might be she would somewhere comfort find.”

Thus with himself debating o'er and o'er,  
The Prince resolves abandonment were best:  
“For how,” saith he, “should any in the wood  
Harm her, so radiant in her grace, so good,  
So noble, virtuous, faithful, famous, pure?”  
Thus mused his miserable mind, seduced  
By Kali's cursèd mischiefs to betray

His sleeping wife. Then, seeing his loin-cloth gone  
And Damayantĭ clad, he drew anigh,  
Thinking to take of hers, and muttering,  
“ May I not rend one fold and she not know ? ”  
So meditating, round the cabin crept  
Prince Nala, feeling up and down its walls ;  
And presently within the purlieus found  
A naked knife, keen-tempered ; therewithal  
Shred he away a piece, and bound it on ;  
Then made with desperate steps to seek the waste,  
Leaving his Princess sleeping ; but anon  
Turns back again in changeful mood, and glides  
Into the hut, and, gazing wistfully  
On slumbering Damayantĭ, moans with tears :  
“ Ah, Sweetheart ! whom nor wind nor sun before  
Hath ever rudely touched ; thou to be couched  
In this poor hut, its floor thy bed, and I,  
Thy lord, deserting thee, stealing from thee  
Thy last robe ! O my Love with the bright smile !  
My slender-waisted queen ! will she not wake  
To madness ? Yea, and when she wanders lone  
In the dark wood, haunted with beasts and snakes,

How will it fare with Bhima's tender child,  
The bright and peerless? My most noble wife!  
May the great sun, may the eight Powers of air,  
The Rudras, Maruts, and the Aświns twain  
Guard thee, thou true and dear one, on thy way!"

Thus to his sleeping queen, in all the earth  
Unmatched for beauty, spake he piteously,  
Then broke away once more, by Kali driven;  
But yet another and another time  
Stole back into the hut for one last gaze,  
That way by Kali dragged, this way by love.  
Two hearts he had, this trouble-stricken Prince—  
One beating "Go!" one throbbing "Stay!" and thus  
Backwards and forwards swings his mind between;  
Till, mastered by the sorrow and the spell,  
Frantic flies Nala, leaving there alone  
That tender sleeper, sighing as she slept.  
He flies—the soulless prey of Kali flies;  
Still, while he hurries through the forest drear,  
Thinking upon the sweet face he hath left.

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FAR distant (King!) was Nala, when, refreshed,  
The slender-waisted wakened, shuddering  
At the wood's silence; but, when seeking him,  
She found no Nala, sudden anguish seized  
Her frightened heart, and lifting high her voice,  
Loud cried she "Maharaja! Nishadh's Prince,  
Ha, Lord! ha, Maharaj! ha, Master! why  
Hast thou abandoned me? Now am I lost,  
Am doomed, undone; left in this lonesome gloom!  
Wert thou not named, O Nala! true and just!  
Yet art thou these to quit me while I slept?  
And hast thou so forsaken me, thy wife—  
Thine own fond wife, who never wrought thee wrong,  
When by all others wrong was wrought on thee?  
How mak'st thou good to me now, lord of men!  
Those words which long ago before the gods  
Thou didst pronounce? Alas! death will not come  
Except at his appointed time to men;  
And therefore for a little I shall live,  
Whom thou hast lived to leave. Nay, 'tis a jest!  
Fie! truant! runaway! enough thou playest:



Come forth, my lord ! I am afraid,—come forth !  
Linger not, for I see—I spy thee there ;  
Thou art within yon thicket ! why not speak  
One word, Nishadha ? Nala ! cruel Prince !  
Thou knowest me lone, and comest not to calm  
My terrors, and be with me in my need.  
Art gone indeed ? I'll not bemoan myself,  
Nor whatso may befall me ; I must think  
How desolate thou art, and weep for thee.  
What wilt thou do, thirsty and hungry, spent  
With wandering, when, at nightfall 'mid the trees,  
Thou hast me not, sweet Prince, to comfort thee !”

Thereat, distracted by her bitter pain,  
Like one whose heart is fire, forward and back  
She runs, hither and thither, weeping, wild.  
One while she sinks to earth, one while she springs  
Quick to her feet ; now utterly o'ercome  
By fear and fasting, now by grief driven mad,  
Wailing and sobbing ; till anon, with moans  
And broken sighs and tears, Bhima's fair child,  
The ever-faithful wife, speaks thus again :

“By whomsoever’s spell this harm hath fallen  
On Nishadh’s lord, I pray that evil one  
May bear a bitterer plague than Nala doth.  
To him, whoever set my guileless Prince  
On these ill deeds, I pray some direr might  
May bring ev’n darker days, and life to live  
More miserable still!”

Thus, woe-begone,  
Mourned that great-hearted wife her vanished lord,  
Seeking him ever in the gloomy shades,  
By wild beasts haunted. Roaming everywhere,  
Like one possessed—frantic, disconsolate,  
Went Bhima’s daughter. “Ha, ha! Maharaj!”  
So crying runs she, so in every place  
Is heard her ceaseless wail, as when is heard  
The fish-hawk’s cry, which screams, and circling  
screams,  
And will not stint complaining.

Suddenly,  
Straying too near his den, a serpent’s coils

Seized Bhima's daughter! a prodigious snake,  
Glittering and strong, and furious for food,  
Knitted about the Princess. She, o'erwhelmed  
With horror and the cold enfolding death,  
Spends her last breath in pitiful laments  
For Nala, not herself. "Ah, Love!" she cried,  
"That would have saved me, who must perish now,  
Seized in the lone wood by this hideous snake,  
Why art thou not beside me? What will be  
Thy thought, Nishadha! me remembering  
In days to come, when, from the curse set free,  
Thou hast thy noble mind again, thyself,  
Thy wealth—all save thy wife? Then thou'lt be sad,  
Be weary, wilt need food and drink, but I  
Shall minister no longer! Who will tend  
My love, my lord, my lion among kings,  
My blameless Nala,—Damayantī dead?"

That hour a hunter, roving through the brake,  
Heard her bewailing, and with quickened steps  
Made nigh; and, spying a woman, almond-eyed  
Lovely, forlorn, by that fell monster knit,

He ran, and, as he came, with keen shaft clove,  
Through gaping mouth and crown, th' unwitting worm,  
Slaying it. Then the woodman from its folds  
Freed her, and laved the snake's slime from her limbs  
With water of the pool, comforting her  
And giving food; and afterwards (my King!)  
Inquiry made: "What doest in this wood,  
Thou with the fawn's eyes? and how camest thou,  
My mistress, to such pit of misery?"

And Damayantī, spoken fair by him,  
Recounted all which had befallen her.

But, gazing on her graces, scantily clad  
With half a cloth, those smooth full sides, those breasts  
Beauteously swelling, form of faultless mould,  
Sweet youthful face, fair as the moon at full,  
And dark eyes by long curving lashes swept;  
Hearing her tender sighs and honeyed speech,  
The hunter fell to hot desire: he dared  
Essay to woo, with whispered words at first,  
And then, by amorous approach, the queen;



Who, presently perceiving what he would,  
And all that baseness of him—being so pure,  
So chaste and faithful—like a blazing torch  
Took fire of scorn and anger 'gainst the man,  
Her true soul burning at him; till the wretch,  
Wicked in heart, but impotent of mind,  
Glared on her, splendidly invincible  
In weakness, loftily defying force,  
A living flame of lighted chastity.  
She then, albeit so desolate, so lone,  
Abandoned by her lord, stripped of her state,  
Like a proud princess stormed, flinging away  
All terms of supplication, cursing him  
With wrath which scorched. “If I am clear in heart  
And true in thought unto Nishadha’s king,  
Then may’st thou, vile pursuer of the beasts!  
Sink to the earth stone-dead!”

While she did speak  
The hunter breathless fell to earth, stone-dead,  
As falls a tree-trunk blasted by the bolt.



Which haunt, with swinging snakes, the undergrowth.  
Dark pools she saw, and drinking-holes, and peaks  
Wherefrom brake down in tumbling cataracts,  
The wild white waters, marvellous to hear.  
Also she passed—this daughter of a king—  
Where snorted the fierce buffaloes, and where  
The grey boars rooted for their food, and where  
The black bears growled, and serpents in the grass  
Rustled and hissed. But all along the way  
Safe paced she in her majesty of grace,  
High fortune, courage, constancy, and right,  
Vidarbha's glory,—seeking, all alone,  
Lost Nala; and less terror at those sights  
Came to sad Damayantī for herself,  
Threading the dreadful forest, than for him :  
Most was her mind on Nala's fate intent.  
Bitterly grieving stood that sweet Princess  
Upon a rock, her tender limbs a-thrill  
With heavy fears for Nala, while she spake :

“Broad-chested chief! my long-armed lord of men!  
Nishadha's king! ah whither art thou gone,

Leaving me thus in the unpeopled wood ?  
The Aśwamedha sacrifice thou mad'st,  
And all the rites, and royal gifts hast given ;  
A lion-hearted prince, holy and true  
To all save me ! That which thou didst declare  
Hand in hand with me, once so fond and kind,  
Recall it now, thy sacred word, thy vow,  
Whithersoever, Raja, thou art fled.  
Think how the message of the gold-winged swans  
Was spoken by thine own lips then to me !  
True men keep faith ; this is the teaching taught  
In Vedas, Angas, and Upangas all,  
Hear which we may :—wilt thou not therefore, Prince,  
Wilt thou not, terror of thy foes ! keep faith,  
Making thy promise good to cleave to me ?  
Ha ! Nala, lord ! am I not surely still  
Thy chosen, thy beloved ? Answerest thou not  
Thy wife in this dark horror-haunted shade ?  
The tyrant of the jungle, fierce and fell,  
With jaws agape to take me, crouches nigh,  
And thou not here to rescue me ! not thou  
Who saidst none other in this world was dear

But Damayantî! Show the fond speech true  
Uttered so often. Why repliest not  
To me, thy well-belovèd; me, distraught,  
Longed-for and longing; me, my prince and pride!  
That am so weary, weak, and miserable,  
Stained with the mire, in this torn cloth half-clad,  
Alone and weeping, seeing no help near?  
Ah! stag of all the herd! leav'st thou thy hind  
Astray, regarding not her tears which roll?  
My Nala! Maharaja! it is I  
Who cry, thy Damayantî, true and pure,  
Lost in the wood, and still thou answerest not!  
High-born, high-hearted! full of grace and strength  
In all thy limbs, shall I not find thee soon  
On yonder hill? shall I not see, at last,  
In some track of this grim beast-haunted wood,  
Standing or seated, or upon the leaves  
Lying, or coming, him who is of men  
The glory, but for me the grief-maker?  
If not, whom shall I question, woe-begone,  
Saying: 'In any region of this wood  
Hast thou, perchance, seen Nala?' Is there none

In all the forest would reply to me  
With tidings of my lord, wandered away,  
Kingly in mind and form, of hosts of foes  
The conqueror? Who will say, with blessed voice,  
'That Raja with the lotus eyes is nigh,  
Whom thou dost seek!'—Nay! here comes one to ask,  
The golden forest-king, his great jaws armed  
With fourfold fangs;—a tiger standeth now  
Face to face in my path. I'll speak with him  
Fearlessly:—'Dreadful chief of all this waste!  
Thou art the sovereign of the beasts, and I  
Am daughter of Vidarbha's king; my name  
The Princess Damayantī; know thou me  
Wife of Nishadha's lord—of Nala—styled  
Subduer of his Foes. Him seek I here,  
Abandoned, sorrow-stricken, miserable!  
Comfort me, mighty beast! if so thou canst,  
Saying thou hast seen Nala; but if this  
Thou canst not do, then—ah! thou savage lord!  
Terrible friend! devour me, setting me  
Free from my woes!'—The tiger answereth not;  
He turns and quits me in my tears, to stalk



Down where the river glitters through the reeds,  
Seeking its seaward way. Then will I pray  
Unto this sacred Mount of clustered crags,  
Broad-shouldered, shining, lifting high to heaven  
Its diverse-coloured peaks, where the mind climbs,  
Its hid heart rich with silver veins and gold,  
And stored with many a precious gem unseen :  
Clear towers it o'er the forest, broad and bright  
Like a green banner ; and the sides of it  
House many living things, lions and boars,  
Tigers and elephants, and bears and deer.  
Softly around me from its feathered flocks  
The songs ring, perched upon the kinsuk trees,  
The aśokas, vakuls, and punnâga boughs,  
Or hidden in the karnikara leaves,  
Or tendrils of the dhava or the fig ;  
Full of grey glens it spreads, where waters leap  
And bright birds lave. This king of hills I sue  
For tidings of my lord : ' O Mountain-lord !  
Far-seen and celebrated hill, that cleav'st  
The blue o' the sky, refuge of living things,  
Most noble eminence ! I worship thee ;



Thee I salute, who am a monarch's child,  
 The daughter and the consort of a prince,  
 The high-born Damayantī, unto whom  
 Bhima, Vidarbha's chief, that puissant lord,  
 Was sire, renowned o'er earth. Protector he  
 Of the four castes, performer of the rites  
 Called Rajasuya and the Aśwamedh,  
 A bounteous giver, first of rulers, known  
 For his large shining eyes; holy and just,  
 Fast to his word, unenvious, sweet of speech,  
 Gentle and valiant, dutiful and pure,  
 The guardian of Vidarbha, of his foes  
 The slayer. Know me, O majestic mount!  
 For that king's daughter, bending low to thee.  
 In Nishadh lived the father of my lord,  
 The Maharaja Virasena named,  
 Wealthy and great; whose son, of regal blood,  
 High-fortuned, powerful, and noble-souled,  
 Ruleth by right the realm paternal: he  
 Is Nala, terror of all enemies,  
 Dark Nala, praised in song, Nala the just,  
 The pure, deep-seen in Vedas, sweet of speech,

Drinker of soma-juice, and worshipper  
Of Agni; sacrificing, giving gifts;  
First in the wars, a perfect princely lord!  
His wife am I, great Mountain! and come here,  
Fortuneless, husbandless, and spiritless,  
Everywhere seeking him, my best of men.  
O Mount, whose double ridge stamps on the sky  
Yon line, by fivescore splendid pinnacles  
Indented! tell me, in this gloomy wood  
Hast thou seen Nala?—Nala, wise and bold,  
Like a tusked elephant for might, long-armed,  
Indomitable, gallant, glorious, true;  
Nala, Nishadha's chief—hast thou seen him?  
Ah, mountain! why consolest thou me not,  
Answering one word to sorrowful, distressed,  
Lonely, lost Damayantī?"

Then she cried:

"But answer for thyself, hero and lord;  
If thou be'st in the forest, show thyself.  
Alas! when shall I hear that voice, as low,  
As tender as the murmur of the rain,

When great clouds throng ; as sweet as amrit-drink ?  
Thy voice once more, my Nala ! calling to me  
Full softly 'Damayantī !' Dearest Prince !  
That would be music soothing to those ears,  
As sound of sacred legends ; that would stay  
My pains, and comfort me, and bring me peace."

Thereafter, turning from the mount, she went  
Northwards, and, journeying three nights and days,  
Came on a green incomparable grove,  
By holy men inhabited : a haunt  
Placid as Paradise, whose indwellers  
Like to Vāsistha, Bhrigu, Atri were,  
Those ancient saints. Restraining sense they lived,  
Heedful in meats, subduing passion, pure,  
Breathing within, their food water and herbs,  
Ascetics, very holy, seeking still  
The heavenward road, clad in the bark of trees  
And skins, all idle gauds of earth laid by.  
This hermitage, peopled by gentle ones,  
Glad Damayantī saw, circled with herds  
Of wild things grazing fearless, and with troops

Of monkey-folk o'erhead; and when she saw,  
Her heart was lightened for its quietness.  
So drew she nigh, that lovely wanderer—  
Bright-browed, long-tressed, large-hipped, full-bosomed,  
fair,  
With pearly teeth and honeyed mouth, in gait  
Right queenly still, having those long black eyes,  
The wife of Vîrasena's son, the gem  
Of all dear women, glory of her time—  
Sad Damayantî entered their abode,  
Those holy men saluting reverently  
With modest body bowed. Thus stood she there;  
And all the saints spake gently "*Swâgatam!*  
Welcome!" and gave the greetings which are meet;  
And afterwards "Repose thyself" they said;  
"What would'st thou have of us?" Then with soft words  
The slender-waisted spake: "Of all these here  
So worshipful, in sacrifice and rite,  
Amid your beasts and birds, in tasks and toils  
And blameless duties, is it well?" And they  
Answered: "We thank you, noble lady; well!  
Tell us, most beauteous one, thy name, and say



What thou desirest. Seeing thee so fair,  
So noble, yet so sorrowful, our minds  
Are lost in wonder. Weep not; comfort take.  
Art thou the goddess of the wood? art thou  
The mountain Yakshi, or belike the sprite  
Which lives under the river? Tell us true,  
Gentle and faultless form."

Whereat reply

Thus made she to the Rishis: "None of these  
Am I, good saints; no goddess of the wood,  
Nor yet a mountain nor a river sprite.  
A woman ye behold, most holy ones,  
Whose moving story I will tell ye true.  
The Raja of Vidarbha is my sire,  
Bhima his name, and—best of Twice-born—know  
My husband is Nishadha's chief, the famed,  
The wise, and valiant, and victorious prince,  
The high and lordly Nala; of the gods  
A steadfast worshipper, of Brahmanas  
The friend; his people's shield, honoured and strong;  
Truth-speaking, skilled in arms, sagacious, just;

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Terrible to all foes; fortunate; lord  
Of many conquered towns; a godlike man;  
Princeliest of princes—Nala; one that hath  
A countenance like the full moon's for light,  
And eyes of lotus. This true offerer  
Of sacrifices—this close votary  
Of Vedas and Vedāngas, in the war  
Deadly to enemies, like sun and moon  
For splendour—by a certain evil band  
Being defied to dice, my virtuous Prince  
Was, by their wicked arts, of realm despoiled,  
Wealth, jewels, all. I am his woeful wife,  
The Princess Damayantī. Seeking him  
Through thickets have I roamed, over rough hills,  
By crag and river, and the reedy lake,  
By marsh and waterfall and jungle-bush,  
In quest of him, my lord, my warrior,  
My hero,—and still roam, uncomforted.  
Worshipful brethren! say if he hath come—  
Nishadha's chief, my Nala—hitherward  
Unto your pleasant homes,—he for whose sake  
I wander in the dismal pathless wood,

With bears and tigers haunted—terrible ?

Ah ! if I find him not ere there be passed

Many more nights and days, peace will I win ;

For death shall set my mournful spirit free.

What cause have I to live, lacking my Prince ?

Why should I longer breathe, whose heart is  
dead

With sorrow for my lord ? ”

To Bhima's child,

So in the wood bewailing, made reply

Those holy truthful men : “ Beautiful one !

The future is for thee ; fair will it fall :

Our eyes, by long devotions opened, see

Even now thy lord ; thou shalt behold him soon,

Nishadha's chief, the famous Nala, strong

In battle, loving justice. Yea, thy Prince

Thou wilt regain, Bhima's sad daughter ! freed

From troubles, purged of sin ; and witness him,

With all his gems and glories, governing

Nishadha once again, invincible,

Joy of his friends and terror of his foes.

Yea, noblest ! thou shalt have thy love anew,  
In days to come."

So speaking, from the sight  
Of DamayantĪ at that moment passed  
Hermits, with hermitage and holy fires  
Evanishing. In wonderment she stood  
Gazing bewildered. Then the Princess cried :  
" Was it in dream I saw them ? whence befell  
This unto me ? where are the brethren gone ?  
The ring of huts, the pleasant stream that ran  
With birds upon its crystal banks, the grove  
Delightful with its fruits and flowers ? " Long while  
Pondered and wondered DamayantĪ there,  
Her bright smile fled, pale, strengthless, sorrowful ;  
Then to another region of the wood,  
With sighs and eyes welling great tears, she passed  
Lamenting ; till a beauteous tree she spied  
The Aśoka—best of trees. Fair rose it there  
Beside the forest, glowing with the flame  
Of gold and crimson blossoms, and its boughs  
Full of sweet-singing birds.

*"Ahvat! Look!"*

She cried. "Ah, lovely tree! that wavest here  
Thy crown of countless shining clustering blooms  
As thou wert woodland-king! Aśoka tree!  
Tree called the 'Sorrow-ender'—Heart's-ease tree!  
Be what thy name saith; end my sorrow now,  
Saying, ah! bright Aśoka! thou hast seen  
My Prince, my dauntless Nala,—seen that lord  
Whom Damayantī loves and his foes fear;  
Seen great Nishadha's chief, so dear to me:  
His tender princely skin in rended cloth  
Scantly clad! Hath he passed wandering  
Under thy branches, grievously forlorn?  
Answer, Aśoka; 'Sorrow-ender,' speak!  
That I go sorrowless. O Heart's-ease! be  
Truly heart's-easing,—ease my heart of pain!"

Thus, wild with grief, she spake unto the tree,  
Round and round pacing, as to reverence it;  
And then, unanswered, the sweet lady went  
Through wastes more dreadful, passing many a Ran,  
Many still-gliding rillets, many a peak

Tree-clad, with beasts and birds of wondrous sort,  
In dark ravines, and caves, and lonely glooms.  
These things saw Damayantí, Bhima's child,  
Seeking her lord.

At last, on the long road,  
She, whose soft smile was once so beautiful,  
A caravan encountered. Merchantmen  
With trampling horses, elephants, and wains  
Made passage of a river, running slow  
In cool clear waves. The quiet waters gleamed,  
Shining and wide-outspread, between the canes  
Which bordered it, wherefrom echoed the cries  
Of fish-hawks, curlews, and red chakraváks ;  
With sounds of leaping fish, and watersnakes,  
And tortoises, amid its shoals and flats  
Sporting or feeding.

When she spied that throng,  
All-maddened with her anguish, weak and wan,  
Half-clad, bloodless and thin, her long black locks  
Matted with dust, breathlessly brake she in



Upon them—Nala's wife—so beauteous once,  
So honoured. Seeing her, some fled in fear;  
Some gazed, speechless from wonder; some called out,  
Mocking the mournful face with words of scorn;  
But some (my King!) had pity of her woe,  
And spake her fair, inquiring, "Who art thou,  
And whence? and in this wood what seekest thou,  
To come so wild? Thy mien astonisheth!  
Art of our kind, or art thou something strange,  
The spirit of the forest, or the hill,  
Or river-valley? Tell us true, then we  
Will buy thy favour. If indeed thou be'st  
Yakshi or Rakshasi, or she-creature  
Haunting this region, be propitious! send  
Our caravan in safety on its path,  
That we may quickly, by thy fortune, go  
Homeward, and all fair chances fall to us."

Hereby accosted, softly gave response  
That royal lady, weary for her lord,  
Answering the leader of the caravan  
And those that gathered round, a marvelling throng

Of men, and boys, and elders : " Oh, believe  
I am, as you, of mortal birth, but born  
A Raja's child, and made a Raja's wife.  
Him seek I, chieftain of Nishadha named,  
Prince Nala, famous, glorious, first in war.  
If ye know aught of him, my king, my joy,  
My tiger of the jungle, my lost lord,  
Quick ! tell me, comfort me ! "

Then he who led  
Their line, the merchant Śuchi, answering,  
Spake to the peerless Princess : " Hear me now ;  
I am the captain of this caravan,  
But nowhere one named as thy Prince is named  
Have I or these beheld. Of evil beasts  
The woods were full ; cheetahs, and bears, and cats,  
Tigers, and elephants, bison and boar :  
Those saw we in the brake on every side,  
But nowhere aught of human shape save thee.  
May Manibhadra have us in his grace,  
The lord of Yakshas, as I tell thee truth ! "

Then sadly spake she to the trader-chief

And to his band : " Whither wend ye, I pray ?  
Please ye acquaint me where this Sārthā goes ? "

Replied the captain : " Unto Chedi's realm,  
Where rules the just Subāhu, journey we,  
To sell our merchandise, daughter of men."

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THUS by the chieftain of the band informed,  
The peerless Princess journeyed with them, still  
Seeking her lord ; and at the first the way  
Fared through another forest, dark and deep.  
Afterwards came the traders to a pool,  
Broad, everywhere delightful, odorous  
With cups of opened lotus, and its shores  
Green with rich grass and edged with garden trees ;  
A place of flowers, and fruit, and singing birds.  
So cool and clear and peacefully it gleamed,  
That men, with cattle, weary from the march,  
Clamoured to pitch ; and, on their captain's sign,  
The pleasant hollow entered they, and camped,  
All the long caravan, at sunset's hour.

There in the quiet of the middle night  
Deep slumbered these, when sudden on them fell  
A herd of elephants, thirsting to drink ;  
In rut, the mada oozing from their heads ;  
And when those great beasts spied the caravan  
And smelled the tame cows of their kind, they rushed  
Headlong and mad with must, o'erwhelming all,  
In onset vast and irresistible.  
As when from some tall peak into the plain  
Thunder and smoke and crash the rolling rocks,  
Through splintered stems and thorns so breaking a way,  
On swept the herd to where, beside the pool,  
Those sleepers lay, and trampled them to earth,  
Half risen, helpless, shrieking in the dark  
" Haha ! the elephants." Of those unslain,  
Some in the thickets sought a shelter ; some,  
Yet dazed with sleep, stood panic-stricken, mute ;  
Till, here with tusks and there with trunks, the beasts  
Gored them and battered them and trod them flat  
Under their monstrous feet. Then might be seen  
Camels with camel-drivers perishing,  
And men flying in fear who struck at men ;

Terror and death and clamour everywhere :  
While some, despairing, cast themselves to earth ;  
And some, in fleeing, fell and died ; and some  
Climbed to the tree-tops. Thus on every side  
Scattered and ruined was that caravan,  
Cattle and merchants, by the herd assailed.  
So hideous was the tumult, all three worlds  
Seemed filled with fright, and one was heard to call :  
"The fire is in the tents ! fly for your lives !  
Stay not !" and others cried : "Look where we leave  
Our treasures trodden down ! gather them ! Halt !  
Why run ye, losing ours and yours ? Nay, stay !  
Stand ye and we will stand ;" and then to these  
One voice cried "Stand !" another "Fly ! we die !"  
Answered by such again as shouted, "Stand !  
Think what we lose, O cowards !"

While this rout

Raged, amid dying groans and sounds of fear,  
The Princess, waking startled, terror-struck,  
Saw such a sight as might the boldest daunt,  
Such scene as those great lovely lotus eyes



Ne'er gazed upon before. Sick with new dread,  
Her breath suspended 'twixt her lips, she rose,  
And heard of those surviving some one moan  
Amidst his fellows: "From whose evil act  
Is this the fruit? hath worship not been paid  
To mighty Maṇibhadra? gave we not  
The reverence due to Vaishnavan, that king  
Of all the Yakshas? was not offering made  
At th' outset to all spirits which impede?  
Was this the evil portent of the birds?  
Were the stars adverse? or what else hath fall'n?"

And others said, wailing for friends and goods:  
"Who was that woman, with mad eyes, that came  
Into our camp, ill-favoured, hardly cast  
In mortal mould? By her, be sure, was wrought  
This direful sorcery. Demon or witch,  
Yakshī or Rakshasī, or gliding ghost,  
Or something frightful was she. Hers this deed  
Of midnight murders; doubt there can be none!  
Ah! if we could but spy that hateful one,  
The ruin of our march, the woe-maker,

With stones, clods, canes, and clubs, nay, with clenched  
fists,  
We'd strike her dead, the murderess of our band."

Trembling, the Princess heard those angry words,  
And, saddened, maddened, shamed, breathless, she fled  
Into the thicket, doubtful if such sin  
Might not be hers, and with fresh dread distressed.  
"Aho!" she weeps, "pitiless grows the wrath  
Of fate against me; not one gleam of good  
Arriveth! Of what fault is this the fruit?  
I cannot call to mind a wrong I wrought  
To any—even a little thing—in act,  
Or thought, or word; whence then hath come this  
curse?

Belike from ill deeds done in bygone lives  
It hath befall'n, and what I suffer now  
Is payment of old evils undischarged.  
Grievous the doom! my palace lost, my lord,  
My children, kindred; I am torn away  
From home, and love, and all, to roam accurst  
In this plague-haunted waste."

When broke the day,  
Those which escaped alive, with grievous cries,  
Departed, mourning for their fellows slain.  
Each one a kinsman or a friend laments,  
Father or brother, son, or comrade dear.

And Damayantī, hearing, weeps anew,  
Saying: "What dreadful sin was that I wrought  
Long, long ago, which, when I chance to meet  
These wayfarers in the unpeopled wood,  
Dooms them to perish by the elephants,  
In my dark destiny enwrapped? No doubt  
More and more sorrow I shall bear or bring;  
For none dies ere his time: this is the lore  
Of ancient sages; this is why, being glad  
If I could die, I was not trampled down  
Under the elephants. There haps to man  
Nothing except by destiny. Why else,  
Seeing that never have I wrought one wrong  
From childhood's hours, in thought, or word, or deed,  
Hath this woe fall'n? May be—meseems it may,  
The mighty gods, at the Swayamvara

Slighted by me for Nala's dearest sake,  
Are wroth, and by their dread displeasure thus  
To loss and loneliness I am consigned."

So, woe-begone and wild, this noble wife,  
Deserted Damayanti, wailed her griefs;  
And afterwards, with certain Brahmanas  
Saved from the rout, good men that knew the Veds,  
Sadly her road she finished, like the moon,  
Who goeth clouded in the month of rain.  
Thus, travelling long, the Princess drew at last  
Nigh to a city at the evening hour;  
The dwelling-place it was of Chedi's chief,  
The just Subáhu. Through its lofty gates  
Painfully passed she, clad in half a cloth;  
And as she entered—sorrow-stricken, wan,  
Foot-weary, stained with mire, with unsmoothed hair,  
Unbathed, and eyes of madness—those who saw  
Wondered and stared, and watched her as she toiled  
Down the long city street. The children broke  
From play, and—boys with girls—followed her steps,  
So that she came—a crowd encompassing—

Unto the king's door. On the palace roof  
The mother of the Maharaja paced,  
And marked the throng and that sad wayfarer ;  
Then to her nurse spake the queen-mother this :  
" Go thou and bring yon woman unto me !  
The people trouble her ; mournful she walks,  
Seeming unfriended, yet bears she a mien  
Made for a king's abode, and, all so wild,  
Still show her wistful eyes like the great eyes  
Of Lakshmi's self." So downwards went the nurse,  
And bade the rude folk back, and to the roof  
Of the great palace led that wondering one,  
Desolate Damayantī ; whom the queen  
Courteous besought : " Though thou art wan of face,  
Thou wear'st a noble air, which through thy griefs  
Shineth as lightning doth behind its cloud.  
Tell me thy name, and whose thou art, and whence ?  
No low-born form is thine, albeit thou com'st  
Wearing no ornaments, and all alone  
Wanderest, not fearing men ; by some spell safe."  
  
Hearing which words, the child of Bhima spake



Gratefully this: "A woeful woman I,  
And woeful wife, but faithful to my vow:  
High-born, but like a servant, like a slave,  
Lodging where it may hap, and finding food  
From the wild roots and fruits, wherever night  
Brings me my resting-place. Yet is my lord  
A prince noble and great, with countless gifts  
Endued; and him I followed faithfully  
As 'twere his shadow, till hard fate decreed  
That he should fall into the rage of dice;  
And, worsted in that play, into the wood  
He fled, clad in one cloth, frenzied and lone;  
And I his steps attended in the wood,  
Comforting him, my husband. But it chanced,  
Hungry and desperate, he lost his cloth;  
And I, one garment bearing, followed still  
My lord unclad, despairing, reasonless,  
Through many a weary night not slumbering.  
But when, at length, a little while I slept,  
My Prince abandoned me, rending away  
Half of my garment, leaving there his wife,  
Who never wrought him wrong! That lord I seek

By day and night, with heart and soul on fire,—  
Seek, but still find not, though he is to me  
Brighter than light which shines from lotus-cups,  
Divine as are the immortals, dear as breath,  
The master of my life, my pride, my joy !”

Whom, grieving so, her sweet eyes blind with tears,  
Gently addressed Subâhu's mother, sad  
To list as she to tell: “Stay with us here,  
Thou ill-starred lady ! great the friendliness  
I have for thee. The people of our court  
Shall thy lost husband seek ; or, it may be,  
He, too, will wander hither of himself  
By devious paths : yea, mournful one, thy lord  
Thou wilt regain, abiding with us here.”

And Damayantî, bowing, answered thus  
Unto the queen : “I will abide with thee  
O mother of illustrious sons ! if so  
They feed me not on orts, nor seek from me  
To wash the feet of comers, nor that I  
Be set to speak with any stranger men  
Before the curtain ; and if any man

Sue me, that he be punished; and if twice,  
Then that he die, guilty of infamy.  
This is my earnest prayer; but Brahmanas  
Who seek my husband or bear news of him,  
Such will I speak with. If it may be thus,  
Gladly would I abide, great lady, here;  
If otherwise, it is not in my mind  
To sojourn longer."

Very tenderly

Quoth the queen-mother: "All which thou dost ask  
We will ordain. The gods reward thy love  
Which holds such honour." Comforting her so,  
To the king's daughter, young Sunandâ, spake  
The Maharajni: "See, Sunandâ! here,  
Clad as a handmaid but in form divine,  
One of thy years, gentle and true. Be friends;  
Take and give pleasure in glad company,  
Each with the other keeping happy hearts."

So went Sunandâ joyous to her house,  
Leading with loving hands the Princess in,  
The maidens of the court accompanying.

## PART II.

NOT long (O Maharaj!) was Nala fled  
From Damayantī, when, in midmost glooms  
Of the thick wood, a flaming fire he spied,  
And from the fire's heart heard proceed a voice  
Of one imperilled, crying many times:  
"Haste hither, Punyashloka! Nala, haste!"  
"Fear not!" the Prince replied, "I come," and sprang  
Across the burning bushes, where he saw  
A snake—a king of serpents—lying curled  
In a great ring; which reared its dancing crest,  
Saluting; and in human accents spoke:  
"Maharaj! kindly lord! I am the snake  
Karkotaka; by me was once betrayed  
The famous Rishi Narada; his wrath  
Doomed me, thou chief of men, to bear this spell.  
'Coil thy false folds,' he said, 'for ever here,  
A serpent, motionless upon this spot,

Till it shall chance that Nala passeth by  
And bears thee hence; then only from my curse  
Canst thou be freed.' And, prisoned by that curse,  
I have no power to stir, though the wood burns;  
No, not a coil! Good-fellowship I'll show  
If thou wilt succour me. I'll be to thee  
A faithful friend, as no snake ever yet.  
Lift me, and quickly from the flames bear forth;  
For thee I shall grow light." Thereat shrank up  
That monstrous reptile to a finger's length;  
And grasping this, into a place secure  
From burning Nala bore it, where the air  
Breathed freshly, and the fire's black path was stayed.

Then made the Prince to lay the serpent down,  
But yet again it speaks: "Nishadha's lord!  
Grasp me and slowly go, counting thy steps;  
For, Raja, thou shalt have good fortune hence."  
So Nala slowly went, counting his steps;  
And when the tenth pace came, the serpent turned  
And bit the Prince. No sooner pierced that tooth  
Than all the likeness of Nishadha changed;



And, wonder-struck, he gazed upon himself;  
While from the dust he saw the snake arise  
A man, and, speaking as Karkotaka,  
Comfort him thus:

“Thou art by me transformed  
That no man know thee; and that evil one—  
Possessing and undoing thee with grief—  
Shall so within thee by my venom smart,  
Shall through thy blood so ache, that, till he quit,  
He shall endure the woe he did impart.  
Thus by my potent spell, most noble Prince—  
Who sufferest too long—thou wilt be freed  
From him that haunts thee. Fear no more the wood,  
Thou tiger of all princes! fear thou not  
Horned nor fanged beasts, nor any enemies,  
Though they be Brahmans. Safe thou goest now,  
Guarded from grief and hurt, chieftain of men!  
By this kind poison. In the fields of war  
Henceforth the victory always falls to thee;  
Go joyous therefore, Prince! give thyself forth  
For Vahuka the Charioteer: repair

To Rituparna's city, who is skilled  
In play, and dwells in fair Ayodhya.  
Wend thou, Nishadha, thither; he will teach  
Great subtlety in numbers unto thee,  
Exchanging this for thine own matchless gift  
Of taming horses. From the lordly line  
Descended of Ikshváku, glad and kind  
The king will be; and thou, learning of him  
His deepest art of dice, wilt win back all,  
And clasp again thy Princess. Therefore waste  
No thought on woes. I tell thee truth; thy realm  
Thou shalt regain: and, when the time is come  
That thou hast need to put thine own form on,  
Call me to mind, O prince! and tie this cloth  
Around thy body. Wearing it, thy shape  
Thou shalt resume."

Therewith the serpent gave  
A magic twofold robe, not wove on earth,  
Which (O thou son of Kuru!) Nala took;  
And so the snake, transformed, vanished away.

THE great snake being gone, Nishadha's chief  
Set forth, and on the tenth day entered in  
At Rituparna's town : there he besought  
The presence of the Raja, and spake thus :  
" I am the chariot-driver Vahuka ;  
There is not on this earth another man  
Hath gifts like mine to tame and guide the steed ;  
Moreover, thou mayest use me in nice needs  
And dangerous, where kings lack faithful hearts :  
Specially seen I am in dressing meats ;  
And whatso other duties may befall,  
Though they be weighty, I will execute  
If, Rituparna ! thou wilt take me in."

" I take thee," quoth the king ; " dwell here with  
me.

Such service as thou knowest, render us.  
'Tis, Vahuka, for ever in my heart,  
To have my steeds the swiftest ; be thy task  
To train me horses like the wind for speed.  
My charioteer I make thee, and thy wage

Ten thousand gold suvernas. Thou wilt have  
For fellows Varshneya and Jivala;  
With those abiding, lodge thou happy here."

So, entertained and honoured of the king,  
In Rituparna's city Nala dwelled,  
Lodging with Varshneya and Jivala.

There sojourned he (my Raja!) thinking still,  
Of sweet Vidarbha's Princess, day by day;  
And sunset after sunset one sad strain  
He sang: "Where resteth she, that roamed the wood,  
Hungry, and parched, and worn, but always true?  
Doth she remember yet her faultful lord?  
Ah! who is near her now?" So it befell  
Jivala heard him ever sighing this,  
And questioned: "Who is she thou grievest for?  
Say, Vahuka! fain would I know her name.  
Long life be thine, but tell me who he is,  
The blameful man that was the lady's lord."

And Nala answered him: "There lived a man,

Evil and rash, that had a noble wife.  
False to his word he was, and thus it fell  
That, somewhere, for some reasons, (ask not me),  
He quitted her, this rash one. And—so wrenched  
Apart from hers—his spirit, bad and sad,  
Muses and moans, with grief's slow fire consumed,  
Night-time and day-time. Thence it is he sings  
At every sunset this unchanging verse,  
An outcast on the earth, by hazard led  
Hither or thither. Such a man thou seest,  
Woeful, unworthy, holding in his heart  
Always that sin. I was that lady's lord,  
Whom she did follow through the dreadful wood,  
Living by me abandoned at this hour.  
If yet in truth she lives, youthful, alone,  
Unpractised in the ways, not meriting  
Fortunes so hard—Ah! if indeed she lives  
Who roamed the thick and boundless forest, full  
Of prowling beasts, roamed it, my Jivala!  
Unguarded by her guilty lord,—forsook,  
Betrayed, good friend!"



Thus did Nishadha grieve,  
Calling sweet Damayanti to his mind.  
So tarried he within the Raja's house,  
And no man knew his place of sojourning.

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WHILE, stripped of state, the Prince and Princess  
thus

Were sunk to servitude, Bhima made quest,  
Sending his Brahmans forth to search for them  
With strait commands, and for their road-money  
Liberal store. "Seek everywhere," he said  
Unto the twice-born, "Nala;—everywhere  
My daughter Damayanti; whose comes  
Successful in this search, discovering her—  
With lost Nishadha's lord—and bringing them,  
A thousand cows to that man will I give,  
And village lands whence shall be revenue  
As great as from a city. If so be  
Ye cannot bring me Nala and my child,  
To him that learns their refuge I will give  
The thousand cows."

Thereby rejoiced they went,  
Those Brahmans, hither and thither, up and down,  
Into all regions, rajaships, and towns,  
Seeking Nishadha's Raja and his wife.  
But Nala nowhere found they ; nowhere found  
Sweet Damayantî, Bhima's beauteous child.

Until, straying to pleasant Chedipur  
One day a twice-born came, Sudeva named,  
And entered in, and spying round about—  
Upon a feast-day by the king proclaimed,—  
He saw forth-passing through the palace gate  
A woman—Bhima's daughter—side by side  
With young Sunandâ. Little praise had now  
That beauty which in old days shone so bright ;  
Marred with much grief it was, like sunlight dimmed  
By fold on fold of wreathed and creeping mist.  
But when Sudeva marked the great dark eyes,  
Lustreless though they were, and she so worn,  
So listless, "Lo ! the Princess," whispered he ;  
" 'Tis the king's daughter," quoth he to himself :  
And thus mused on :

“Yea! as I used to see

’Tis she! none other woman hath such grace!  
My task is done, I gaze on that one form  
Which is like Lakshmi’s, whom all worlds adore:  
I see the bosoms rounded, dark, and smooth  
As they were sister-moons; the soft moon-face,  
Which with its gentle light makes all things bright  
Where it doth gleam; the large deep lotus-eyes,  
That, like to Rati’s own, the queen of love,  
Beam, each a lovelit star, filling the worlds  
With longing. Ah! fair lotus-flower, plucked up  
By fate’s hard grasp from far Vidarbha’s pool,  
How is thy cup muddied and slimed to-day!  
Ah! moon, how is thy night like to th’ eclipse  
When Rahu swallows up the silver round!  
Ah! tearless eyes, weary with weeping him,  
How are ye like to gentle streams run dry!  
Ah! lake of lilies, where grief’s elephant  
Hath swung his trunk, and turned the crystal black,  
And scattered all the blue and crimson cups,  
And frightened off the birds. Ah! lily-cup,  
Tender, and delicately leaved, and reared

To blossom in a palace built of gems,  
How dost thou wither here, wrenched by the root,  
Sun-scorched and faded ! Noblest, loveliest, best—  
Who bear'st no gems, yet so becomest them—  
How like the new moon's silver horn thou art  
When envious black clouds blot it ! Lost for thee  
Are love, home, children, friends, and kinsmen ; lost  
All joy of that fair body thou dost wear,  
Only that it may last to find thy lord !  
Truly a woman's ornament is this ;  
The husband is her jewel,—lacking him  
She hath none, though she shine with priceless pearls.  
Piteous must be her state ; and, torn from her,  
Doth Nala cling to life, or day by day  
Waste with long yearning ? Oh, as I behold  
Those black locks, and those eyes—dark and long  
shaped,  
As are the hundred-petalled lotus' leaves—  
And watch her joyless who deserves all joy,  
My heart is sore. When will she over-pass  
The river of this sorrow, and come safe  
Unto its farther shore ? When will she meet



Her lord, as moon and moon-star in the sky  
Mingle? For, as I think, in winning her  
Nala should win his happy days again,  
And—albeit banished now—have back his lands.  
Alike in years and graces, and alike  
In lordly race these were: no bride could seem  
Worthy Nishadha, if it were not she;  
Nor husband worthy of Vidarbha's pride,  
Save it were Nala. It is meet I bring  
Comfort forthwith to yon despairing one,  
The consort of the just and noble Prince,  
For whom I see her heart-sick. I will go  
And speak good tidings to that moon-faced queen,  
Who once knew nought of sorrow, and to-day  
Stands yonder, plunged heart-deep in woeful thought."

So, all those signs and marks considering,  
Which stamped her Bhima's child, Sudeva drew  
Nearer, and said: "Vaidarbhi! Nala's wife,  
I am the Brahmana Sudeva, friend  
Unto my lord thy brother, and I come,  
By royal Bhima's mandate, seeking thee.



That Maharaj, thy father, dwells in health ;  
Thy mother and thy house are well, and well—  
With promise of long years—thy little ones,  
Sister and brother. Yet, for thy sake, queen,  
Thy kindred sit as men with spirit gone.  
In search of thee a hundred twice-born rove  
Over all lands."

But (O King Yudhisthir !)  
Hardly one word she heard before she broke  
With question after question on the man,  
Asking of this dear name, and that, and this,  
All mingled with quick tears and tender sighs,  
And hungry gazing on her brother's friend,  
Sudeva—best of Brahmanas—come there.  
Which soon Sunandâ marked, watching them speak  
Apart, and DamayantĪ all in tears.  
So went she to her mother, saying: "See!  
The handmaid thou didst give me talks below  
With one who is a Brahman, all her words  
Mingled with weeping; if thou wilt, demand  
What this man knows."

Therewith swept forth, amazed,  
The mother of the Raja, and beheld  
How Nala's wife spake with the Brahmana;  
Whom straight she bade them summon; and, being  
brought,  
In this wise questioned: "Knowest thou whose wife,  
Whose daughter, this one is, and how she left  
Her kin; and wherefore, being heavenly-eyed  
And noble-mannered, she hath wandered here?  
I am full fain to hear it; tell me all  
No whit withholding; answer faithfully;  
Who is our slave-girl with the goddess-gait?"

The Brahmana Sudeva, so addressed  
Seating himself at ease, unto the queen  
Told Damayantī's story, how all fell.

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SUDEVA said: "There reigns in majesty  
King Bhima at Vidarbha, and of him  
The Princess Damayantī here is child;  
And Virasena's son—Nala—is lord

Over Nishadha, praised in song, and wise ;  
And of that Prince this lady is the wife.  
In play his brother worsted Nala, stripped  
Of lands and wealth the Prince ; who fled his realm,  
Wandering with Damayantî where none knew.  
In quest of Damayantî we have roamed  
The earth's face over, till I found her here  
In thy son's house, the king's,—the very same,  
Since like to her for grace no woman lives  
Of all fair women. Where her eyebrows meet  
A pretty mole, born with her, shall be seen,  
A little lotus-bud, not visible  
By reason of the dust of toil which clouds  
Her face and veils its moonlike beauty. That  
The Wondrous Maker on the rare work stamped  
To be His mark. But as the waxing moon  
Goes thin and darkling for a while, then rounds  
The crescent's rims with splendour, so this queen  
Hath lost not queenliness, being now obscured.  
Soiled with the grime of chares, unbeautified,  
She shows true gold. The fire which trieth gold  
Denoteth less itself by instant heat

Than DamayantĪ by her goodlihood.  
At first sight knew I her: she hath that mole!"

Whilst yet Sudeva spake (O King of men!)  
Sunandâ from her forehead washed away  
The gathered dust, and forth the mark appeared  
'Twixt DamayantĪ's brows, as when clouds break,  
And in the sky the moon, the night-maker,  
Glitters to view. Seeing that spot, awhile  
Sunandâ and the mother of the king  
Gazed voiceless; then they clasped her neck and  
wept,  
Rejoicing; till the queen, staying her tears,  
Exclaimed: "My sister's daughter, Dear! thou art  
By this same mark: thy mother and myself  
Were sisters by one father, he that rules  
Daśarna, King Sudâman. She was given  
To Bhima, and to Virabâhu I.  
Once at Daśarna, in my father's house,  
I saw thee, newly born. Thy race and mine,  
Princess, are one; henceforward, therefore, here  
As I am, DamayantĪ, shalt thou be."



With gladdened heart did DamayantĪ bend  
Before her mother's sister, answering thus:  
"Peaceful and thankful dwelled I here with thee  
Being unknown; my every need supplied,  
My life and honour by thy succour safe.  
Yet, Maharajni! even than this dear home  
One would be dearer; 'tis so many days  
Since we were parted; suffer me to go  
Where those my tender little ones were led,  
Too long, poor babes! of me and of their sire.  
Bereft. If, lady, thou dost think to do  
Kindness to me, this is my wish, to wend  
Unto Vidarbha swiftly; wilt thou bid  
They bear me thither?"

Was no sooner heard  
That fond desire than the queen-mother gave  
Willing command, and soon an ample troop—  
The king consenting—gathered for her guard.  
So was she sent upon a palanquin,  
With soldiers, pole-bearers, and meat and drink,  
And garments as befitted—happier—home.



Thus to Vidarbha came its pride again,  
By no long road ; and joyously her kin  
Brought the sweet Princess in, and welcomed her.  
In peace and safety all her house she found ;  
Her children well,—father and mother, friends.  
The gods she worshipped, and to Brahmanas  
Due reverence made, and whatso else was meet  
That Damayantī did, regal in all.  
To wise Sudeva fell the thousand cows  
By Bhima granted, with the village lands,  
And noble gifts beside.

But when there passed  
One night of rest within the palace walls,  
The wistful Princess to her mother said :  
“ If thou would’st have me live, I tell thee true,  
Dear mother ! it must be by bringing back  
My Nala, my own lord, and only so.”

When this she spake, right sorrowful became  
The Rani, weeping silently, nor gave  
One word of answer ; and the palace girls,

Seeing this grief, sate round them weeping too,  
And crying: "*Haha!* where is gone her lord?"  
And loud the lamentation was of all.

Afterwards to the Maharaj his queen  
Told what was said: "Lord! all uncomforted,  
Thy daughter Damayantî weeps and grieves,  
Lacking her husband. Even to me she spake  
Before our damsels, laying shame aside:  
'Find Nala! let the people of the court,  
Strive day and night to learn where Nala is.'"

Then Bhima, hearing, called his Brahmanas,  
Willing and wise, and issued hest to go  
Into all regions, seeking for the Prince;  
But first, by mandate of the Maharaj,  
To Damayantî all those twice-born came,  
Saying: "Now we depart!" Then Bhima's child  
Gave ordinance: "To whatsoever lands  
Ye wend, speak this,—wherever gather men,  
Speak this,—in every place these verses speak:

*" Whither art thou departed, falsest lover,  
Who stole the half of thy beloved's cloth,  
And left her to awaken and discover  
The wrong thou wroughtest to the love of both.*

*" She, as thou didst command, a sad watch keepeth,  
With woeful heart wearing the rended dress ;  
Prince ! hear her cry, who thus for ever weepeth ;  
Be gentle, Hero ! comfort her distress.*

*" And furthermore," the Princess said, " since fire  
Leaps into flame when the wind fans the spark,  
Be this too spoken, that his heart may burn :*

*" By every husband nourished and protected  
Should every wife be. Think upon the wood !  
Why these thy duties hast thou so neglected,  
Prince ! that wast called noble and true and good ?*

*" Art thou become compassionate no longer,  
Shunning, perchance, my fortune's broken way ?  
Ah ! Husband, love is most ! let love be stronger ;  
' Ahimsā paro dharmas ' \* thou didst say.*

\* Signifying : " Kindness is chief of duties."

"These verses while ye speak," quoth the Princess,  
"Should any man make answer, note him well,  
In any place, and who he is, and where  
He dwells. And if one listens to these words  
Intently, and shall so reply to them,  
Good Brahmans! hold ye fast his speech, and bring,  
Breath by breath, all of it unto me here;  
But so that he shall know not whence ye speak,  
If ye go back. Do this unweariedly,  
And if one answer, be he high or low,  
Wealthy or poor, learn all he was, and is,  
And what he doth."

Hereby enjoined, they went,  
Those twice-born, into all the lands to seek  
Prince Nala in his loneliness. Through towns,  
Cities, and villages, hamlets and camps,  
By shepherds' huts and hermit's caves they passed,  
Searching for Nala; yet they found him not;  
Albeit in every region (O my King!)  
The words of Damayanti, as she taught,  
Spake they again in hearing of all men.

SUDDENLY, after many days, there came  
A Brahman home, Parnāda was he called,  
Who unto Bhima's child in this wise spake :  
" O Damayantī ! seeking Nala still,  
Ayodhya's streets I entered, where I saw  
The Maharaj ; he, Noble-minded one !  
Heard me thy verses say, as thou hadst said ;  
Great Rituparna heard those very words,  
Excellent Princess ! but he answered nought ;  
And no man answered, out of all the throng  
Ofttimes addressed. But when I had my leave,  
And was withdrawn, a man accosted me  
Privately, one of Rituparna's train,  
Vahuka named, the Raja's charioteer,  
Something misshapen, with a shrunken arm,  
But skilled in driving ; very dexterous  
In cookery and sweetmeats. He with groans,  
And tears which rolled and rolled, asked of my  
health,  
And then these verses murmured wistfully :



*"Even when their loss is largest, noble ladies  
Keep the true treasure of their hearts unspent,  
Attaining heaven through faith, which undismayed is  
By wrong, unaltered by abandonment.*

*"Such an one guards with Virtue's golden shield  
Her name from harm ; pious, and pure, and tender ;  
And though her lord forsook her, will not yield  
To wrath, even against that vile offender :*

*"Even against the ruined, rash, ungrateful,  
Faithless, fond Prince, from whom the birds did steal  
His only cloth—whom now a penance fateful  
Dooms to sad days—that dark-eyed will not feel*

*"Anger ;—for if she saw him, she should see  
A man consumed with grief, and loss, and shame ;  
Ill or well lodged, ever in misery,  
Her unthroned lord a slave without a name.*

*"Such words I heard him speak," Parnāda said,  
"And, hastening thence, I tell them to thee here :*

Thou knowest and wilt judge; make the king know."

But Damayantī listened with great eyes  
Welling quick tears, while thus Parnāda spoke;  
And afterwards crept secretly and said  
Unto her mother: "Breathe no word hereof,  
Dear mother, to the king, but let me speak  
With wise Sudeva in thy presence soon.  
Nothing should Bhima know of what I plan,  
But, if thou lovest me, by thee and me  
This shall be wrought. As I was safely led  
By good Sudeva home, so let him go—  
With none less happy fortune,—to bring back  
Ere many days my Nala: let him seek  
Ayodhya, mother dear, and fetch my Prince."

But first Parnāda, resting from his road,—  
That best of twice-born,—did the Princess thank  
With honourable words and gifts: "If home  
My Nala cometh, Brahman," so she spake,  
"Great guerdon will I give! Thou hast well done  
For me herein; better than any man,

Helping me find again my wandered lord."  
To which fair words made soft reply and prayers  
For "peace and fortune" that high-minded one,  
And so passed home, his service being wrought.

Next, to Sudeva spake the sad Princess,  
This (O my King!)—her mother standing by:  
"Good Brahman! to Ayodhya's city go;  
Say in the ears of Raja Rituparn,  
As though thou cam'st a simple traveller:  
'The daughter of King Bhima once again  
Maketh to hold her high Swayamvara;  
The kings and princes from all lands repair  
Thither; the time draws nigh; to-morrow's dawn  
Shall bring the day. If thou wouldst be of it,  
Speed quickly, conquering King! at sun-setting  
Another lord she chooseth for herself;  
Since whether Nala liveth or is dead  
None knoweth.'"

These the words which he should say,  
And, learning them, he sped and thither came,

That Brahmana Sudeva, and he spake  
To Maharaja Rituparna so.

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NOW when the Raja Rituparna heard  
Sudeva's words, he said to Vahuka  
Right pleasantly: "Much mind I have to go  
Where Damayanti holds Swayamvara;  
If to Vidarbha in a single day  
Thou deemest we might drive, my charioteer!"

Of Nala, by his Master thus addressed,  
Rent was the heart with anguish, for he thought:  
"Can Damayanti purpose this? could grief  
So change her? is it not some fine device  
For my sake schemed? or doth my Princess seek,  
All holy as she was, this guilty joy,  
Being so wronged by me, her rash weak lord?  
Frail is a woman's heart and my fault great;  
Thus might she do it, being far from home,

Bereft of friends, desolate with long woe  
Of love for me, my slender-waisted one!  
Yet, no! no! no! she would not,—she that is  
My children's mother! Be it false or true,  
Best shall I know in going; therefore now  
The will of Rituparna must I serve."

Thus pondering in himself, the troubled Prince  
With joined palms meekly to his master said:  
"I shall thy mind accomplish! I can drive  
In one day, Raja, to Vidarbha's gates."

Then in the royal stables, steed by steed,  
Stallions and mares, Vâhuka scanned them all,  
By Rituparna prayed sudden to choose.  
Slowly he picked four coursers, under-fleshed,  
But big of bone and sinew; fetlocked well  
For journeying, high-bred, heavy-framed; of blood  
To match the best, yet gentle; blemish-free;  
Broad in the jaw, with scarlet nostrils spread;  
Bearing the *Avarthas*, the ten true marks;  
Reared on the banks of Indus, swift as wind.



Which, when the Raja looked upon, he cried,  
Half wrathful: "What thing thinkest thou to do?  
Wilt thou betray me? How should sorry jades,  
Lean-ribbed and ragged, take us all that way,  
The long road we must swiftly travel hence?"

Vahuka answered: "See! on all these four  
The ten sure marks; one curl upon each crest,  
Two on the cheeks, two upon either flank,  
Two on the breast, and on each crupper one.  
These to Vidarbha—doubt it not—will go.  
Yet, Raja, if thou wilt have others, speak,  
And I shall yoke them."

Rituparna said:

"I know thou hast deep skill in stable-craft;  
Yoke therefore such four coursers as thou wilt;  
But quickly."

Then those horses, two by two,  
High mettled, spare, and strong, Prince Nala put  
Under the bars; and when the car was hitched,

And eagerly the Raja made to mount,  
At sign the coursers bent their knees and lay  
Along the earth. Then Nala (O my King!)  
With kindly voice cheering the gaunt bright steeds,  
Loosed them, and grasped the reins, and bade ascend  
Varshneya : so he started headlong forth.

At cry of Vahuka the four steeds sprang  
Into the air, as they would fly with him.  
And when the Raja felt them, fleet as wind  
Whirling along, mute sate he and amazed.  
And much Varshneya mused to hear and see  
The thundering of the wheels, the fiery four  
So lightly held, Vahuka's matchless art ;  
" Is Mātali, who driveth Indra's car,  
Our charioteer ? for all the marks of him  
Are here ; or Sālihotra can this be,  
The god of horses, knowing all their ways,  
That here in mortal form his greatness hides ?  
Or is it, can it be, Nala the Prince,  
Nala the steed-tamer ? " Thus pondered he  
" Whatever Nala knew, this one doth know ;

Alike the mastery seems of both ; alike  
I judge their years. If this man be not he,  
Two Nalas are there in the world for skill.  
They say there wander mighty powers on earth  
In strange disguises, who, divinely sprung,  
Veil themselves from us under human mould ;  
Bewilderment it brings me, this his shape  
Misshapen ; from conclusion this alone  
Withholds me ; yet I know not what to think !  
In age and manner one, and so unmatched  
In form ! else Vahuka I must have deemed  
Nala, with Nala's gifts."

So, in his heart,  
Varshneya watching, wondered, being himself  
The second charioteer. But Rituparn  
Sate joyous with the speed, delightedly  
Marking the driving of the Prince ; the eyes  
Attent ; the hand so strong upon the reins ;  
The skill so quiet, wise, and masterful ;  
Great joy the Maharaja had to see.

BY stream and mountain, woodland path and pool,  
Swiftly, like birds that skim in air, they sped;  
Till, as the chariot plunged, the Raja saw  
His shoulder-mantle falling to the ground;  
And, loath to lose the robe, albeit so pressed,  
To Nala cried he: "Let me take it up!  
Check the swift horses, wondrous charioteer!  
And bid Varshneya light and fetch my cloth."  
But Nala answered: "Far it lies behind  
A yojana already we have passed;  
We cannot turn again to gather that."

A little onward Rituparna saw  
Within the wood a tall myrobolan  
Heavy with fruit; hereat eager he cried;  
"Now, Vahuka! my skill thou mayest behold  
In the arithmic. All arts no man knows;  
Each hath his wisdom, but in one man's wit  
Is perfect gift of one thing and not more.  
From yonder tree how many leaves and fruits  
Think'st thou lie fallen there upon the earth?

Just one above a hundred of the leaves,  
And of the fruits five score, unto a nut !  
And on those two limbs hang of dancing leaves  
Five crores exact ; and should'st thou pluck yon boughs  
Together with their shoots, on those twain boughs  
Swing twice a thousand nuts and ninety-five."

Vahuka checked the chariot, wonderingly,  
And answered : " Imperceptible to me  
Is this thou boastest, slayer of thy foes ;  
But I to proof will put it, hewing down  
The tree, and, having counted, I shall know.  
Before thine eyes those branches twain I'll lop ;  
How prove thee, Maharaja ! otherwise,  
Whether this be or be not ? I will tell—  
One by one—fruits and leaves before thee, King !  
Varshneya for a space can rein the steeds."

To him replied the Raja : " Time is none  
Now to delay."

Vahuka answered quick—  
(His own set purpose serving) : " Stay this space,



Or by thyself drive on. The road is good ;  
The son of Vrishni will be charioteer !”

At this the Raja answered soothingly :  
“ There is not in the earth another man  
That hath thy skill ; and by thy skill I look  
To reach Vidarbha, O thou steed-tamer !  
Thou art my trust ; make thou not hindrance now.  
Yet would I suffer, too, what thou dost ask  
If surely thou canst reach Vidarbha’s gate  
Before yon sun hath sunk.”

Nala replied :

“ When I have counted those Vibhitak boughs,  
Vidarbha I will reach ; now keep thy word.”

Ill-pleased the Raja said : “ Halt then and count !  
Take one bough from the branch which I shall show,  
And tell its fruits, and satisfy thy soul.”

So, leaping from the car, eager he shore  
The bough and counted ; and, all wonder-struck,

To Rituparna spake : " Lo, as thou said'st,  
So many fruits there be upon this bough !  
Exceeding marvellous is this thy gift ;  
I burn to know such learning, how it comes."

Answered the Raja, for his journey fain :  
" My mind is quick in numbers, skilled to count ;  
I have that science."

" Give it me, dear Lord !"

Vahuka cried ; " teach me, I pray, this lore ;  
And take from me my skill in horse-taming."

Spake Rituparn—impatient to proceed,  
Yet of such skill desirous :—" Be it so !  
As thou hast prayed, receive my secret art,  
Exchanging with me thy deep mastery  
Of horses."

Thereupon did he impart  
His rules of numbers, and th' arithmic lore.

But wonderful ! so soon as Nala knew

That hidden gift, the accursed Kali leapt  
Forth from his breast, the evil spirit's mouth  
Spewing the poison of Karkôtaka,  
Even as it issued. From the afflicted Prince  
That bitter plague of Kali passed away ;  
And for a space Prince Nala lost himself,  
Rent by such agony. But when he saw  
The evil one take visible shape again,  
Freed from the serpent's poison, Nishadh's lord  
Had thought to curse him there ; but Kali stood  
With clasped palms trembling, and besought the  
Prince,

Saying : " Thy wrath restrain ! Sovereign of men !  
I will repay thee well. Thy virtuous wife,  
Indrasen's angered mother, laid her ban  
Upon me, when thou didst forsake her : since  
Within thee have I dwelled in anguish sore,  
Tortured and tossed and burning, night and day,  
With venom from the Great Snake's fang, which  
passed

Into me by thy blood. Be pitiful !  
I take my refuge in thy mercy ! Hear

My promise, Prince ! wherever men henceforth  
Shall name thee before people, praising thee,  
This shall protect them from the dread of me ;  
NALA shall guard from KALI, if so now  
Thou spare to curse me, seeking grace of thee."

Thus supplicated, Nala stayed his wrath,  
Acceding ; and the direful Kali fled  
Into the wounded tree, possessing it.  
But of no eyes save Nala's was he seen,  
Nor heard of any other ; and the Prince  
His sorrows shaking off—when Kali passed,  
After that numbering of the leaves—in joy  
Unspeakable, and glowing with new hope,  
Mounted the car again, and urged his steeds.  
But from that hour the tall myrobolan  
Possessed by Kali, stood there sear and dead.

Then, onward—onward—speeding like the birds,  
Those coursers flew ; and fast and faster still  
The glad Prince cheered them forward, all elate ;  
And proudly rode the Raja toward the walls



Of far Vidarbha. Thus he journeyed down—  
Exultant Nala—free of trouble now,  
Quit of the evil spell, but bearing still  
His form misshapen and the shrunken limb.

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AT sunset in Vidarbha (Good my Liege!)  
The watchers on the walls proclaimed: "There comes  
The Raja Rituparna!" Bhima bade  
Open the gates; and thus they entered in,  
Making all quarters of the city shake  
With rattling of the chariot-wheels. But when  
The horses of Prince Nala heard that sound,  
For joy they neighed, as when of old their lord  
Drew nigh. And Damayantî in her bower  
Far off that rattling of the chariot heard—  
As when, at time of rain, is heard the voice  
Of clouds low-thundering—and her bosom thrilled  
At echo of that ringing sound. It came  
Loud and more loud, like Nala's, when, of old,  
Gripping the reins, he cheered his mares along.



It seemed like Nala to the Princess, then,  
That clatter of the trampling of the hoofs;  
It seemed like Nala to the stabled steeds;  
Upon the palace-roof the peacocks heard  
And screamed; the elephants within their stalls  
Heard it and trumpeted; the coursers tied  
Snorted for joy to hear that leaping car:  
Peacocks and elephants and cattle stalled  
All called and clamoured with uplifted heads,  
As wild things do at noise of coming rain.

Then to herself the Princess spake: "This car,  
The rolling of it, echoing all around,  
Gladdens my heart! It must be Nala comes,  
My chief of men! If I see not this day  
My Prince, that hath the bright and moon-like face;  
My hero of unnumbered gifts, my lord;  
Ah, I shall die! If this day fall I not  
Into his opening arms at last—at last!  
And feel his close embrace, oh, beyond doubt,  
I cannot live! If, ending all, to-day  
Nishadha comes not, with these ringing wheels

Like far-off thunder, then to-night I'll leap  
Into the golden, flickering, fiery flames !  
If now—now—now—my lion draws not nigh,  
My warrior, strong as the wild elephant,  
My Prince of princes, I shall surely die.  
Nought call I now to mind he said or did  
That was not rightly said and justly done ;  
No idle word he spoke, even in free speech ;  
Patient and lordly, generous to bestow  
Beyond all givers ;—scorning to be base,  
Yea, even in secret ; such Nishadha was.  
Alas ! when day and night I think of him,  
How is my heart consumed, reft of its joy ! ”

So meditating, like one torn by thoughts,  
She mounted to the palace-roof to see ;  
And thence, in the mid-court, the car beheld  
Arriving : Rituparn and Vahuka  
She saw, with Vrishni's son, descend and loose  
The panting horses, wheeling back the car.

Then Rituparn, alighting, sought the king,

Bhima the Maharaja, far-renowned,  
Whom Bhima with fair courtesies received ;  
For well he deemed such breathless visit made  
With deep cause, knowing not the women's plots.  
" *Swâgatam !* " cried he, " what hath brought thee,  
Prince ? "

For nothing wist he that the Raja came  
Suitor of Damayantî. Questioned so,  
This Raja Rituparna, shrewd as brave—  
Seeing no kings nor princes in the court,  
Nor noise of the Swayamvara, nor crowd  
Of Brahmans gathering, weighing all those things—  
Answered in this wise : " I am come, great Lord !  
To make thee salutations ! " But the king  
Laughed in his beard at Rituparna's word,  
That this of many weary yojanas  
Should be the mark ! " *Ahoswid !* hath he passed  
Through twenty towns," thought he, " and hither flown  
To say good-morrow ? Nay, it is not that !  
Well, I shall know it when he tells it me."

Thereat, with friendly speech his noble guest

The king to rest dismissed. "Repose thyself,"  
Quoth he; "the road was long; weary thou art!"  
And Rituparn, with sentences of grace  
Replying to this graciousness, was led  
By slaves to his allotted sleeping-rooms;  
And after Rituparn Varshneya went.  
Vahuka, left alone, the chariot ran  
Into its shed, and from the foamy steeds  
Unbuckled all the harness, thong by thong,  
Speaking soft words to them; then sate him down,  
Alone, forgotten, on the driving-seat.

But Damayantî, seeing Rituparn,  
And Vrishni's son, and him called Vahuka,  
Spake sorrowful: "Whose was the thunder then  
Of that fleet car? It seemed like Nala's own,  
Yet here I see no Nala! Hath yon man  
My lord's art learned, or the other one, that thus  
Their car should thunder as when Nala comes?  
Could Rituparna drive as Nala doth,  
So that those chariot-wheels should sound like his?"



And, after having pondered (O my King !),  
The beauteous Princess sent her handmaiden  
To Vahuka, that she might question him.

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“GO, Keshinī!” the Princess said, “inquire  
Who is that man upon the driving-seat,  
Misshapen, with the shrunken arm : approach  
Composedly, question him winningly  
With greetings kind, and bid him answer thee  
According to the truth. I feel it here—  
A doubt, a hope—that this, perchance, maybe  
My Lord and Prince ; there is some new-born joy  
Fluttering within my breast. Accost him, girl ;  
And, ’ere thou partest, what Parnâda said  
Say thou, and hear his answer, blameless one !  
And bring it on thy lips !”

Then went the maid  
Demurely, and accosted Vahuka  
While Damayantī watched them from the roof.



"*Kūshalam tē bravāmi!* health and peace  
 I wish thee!" said she. "Wilt thou answer true  
 What Damayantī asks? She sends to ask  
 Whence set ye forth and wherefore are ye come  
 Hither? Vidarbha's Princess fain would know."

"'Twas told my Raja," Vahuka replied,  
 "That Damayantī, for the second turn,  
 Holds her Swayamvara: the Brahman's word  
 Was 'This shall be to-morrow:' so he sped,  
 My Raja, on that news, with steeds which fly  
 A hundred yojanas, swift as the winds,  
 Exceeding fleet! His charioteer am I."

"Who then," Keshinī asked, "is he that rode,  
 The third? whence cometh he, and what his race?  
 And thou thyself whence sprung? and tell me why  
 Thou servest thus?"

Then Vahuka replied:  
 "Varshneya is the third who rode with us,  
 The famous charioteer of Nala he;

When thy Prince fled he went to Koshala  
And took our service. I, in horse-taming  
And dressing meat have skill, so am I made  
King Rituparna's driver and his cook."

"Knoweth Varshneya, then, where Nala fled?"  
Inquired the maid, "and did he tell thee this,  
Or what spake he?"

"Of that unhappy Prince  
He brought the children thither, and then went  
Even where he would, of Nala wotting naught;  
Nor wotteth any man, fair damsel! more.  
Hidden from mortal eyes Nishadha lives,  
Wandering the world, his very body changed:  
Of Nala only Nala's own heart knows,  
And by no sign will he bewray himself."

Keshinî said: "That Brâhman, who did wend  
First to Ayodhya, bore a verse to say  
Over and over everywhere: strange words,  
Made by a woman's wit. List unto them:

*"Whither art thou departed, falsest lover !*

*Who stole the half of thy beloved's cloth ;*

*And left her to awaken and discover*

*The wrong thou wroughtest to the love of both ?*

*"She, as thou didst command, a sad watch keepeth,*

*With woeful heart wearing the rended dress ;*

*Prince ! hear her cry, who thus for ever weepeth ;*

*Be gentle, hero ! comfort her distress !"*

*"What was it thou didst utter, hearing this ?*

*Some gentle speech !—say it again ! the queen*

*My peerless mistress, fain would know from me.*

*Nay, on thy faith ! when thou didst hear that man,*

*What was it thou replied'st ? She would know."*

*(Descendant of the Kurus !) Nala's heart—*

*While so the maid spoke—well-nigh burst with grief,*

*And from his eyes fast flowed the rolling tears ;*

*But mastering his anguish, holding down*

*The passion of his pain, with voice which strove*

*To speak through sobs, the Prince repeated this :*

*"Even against the ruined, rash, ungrateful,  
Faithless, fond Prince, from whom the birds did steal  
His only cloth, whom now a penance fateful  
Dooms to sad days—that dark-eyed will not feel*

*"Anger ;—for if she saw him, she should see  
A man consumed with grief, and loss, and shame ;  
Ill or well lodged, always in misery,  
Her unthroned lord a slave without a name."*

Speaking these verses, woeful Nala moaned,  
And, overcome by thought, restrained no more  
His welling tears ; fast broke they forth (O King !).  
But Keshinî returning, told his words  
To Damayantî, and the grief of him.

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WHEN Damayantî heard, sore troubled still,  
Yet in her heart supposing him her Prince,  
Again she spake : "Speed, Keshinî ! and watch  
Whatever this man doeth ; near him stand,  
Holding thy peace, and mark the ways of him,  
And all his acts, going and coming ; note



If aught there be of strange in any deed.  
Let them not give him fire, my girl! not though  
This hindereth sore; nor water, though he ask  
Even with beseeching. Afterward observe,  
And bring me what befalls, and every sign  
Of earthly or unearthly power he shows;  
And whatsoever else Vahuka doth,  
See it and say."

Thereon Keshinî sped,  
Obeying Damayantî; and, at hand,  
Whatever by that horse-tamer was wrought,  
The damsel watched; and all his ways, and came  
Back to the Princess, unto whom she told  
Each thing Vahuka did, as it befell,  
And what the signs were, and the wondrous marks  
Of earthly and unearthly gifts in him.

" Certes!" quoth she, " the man is magical,  
But high and holy-mannered. Never yet  
Saw I another such, nor heard of one!  
Passing the low door of the inner court,



Where we must stoop, he did not bow his head,  
But as he came the lintel lifted up  
And gave him space! Bhima the king had sent  
Many and diverse meats for Rituparn,  
Of beast and bird and fish—great store of food—  
For cleansing which the chatties stood hard by,  
All empty; yet he did but look on them,  
Wishing, and lo! the water brimmed the pots!  
Then having washed the meats, he hasted forth  
In quest of fire, and holding towards the sun  
A knot of withered grass, the bright flame blazed  
Instant amidst it! Wonderstruck I was  
This miracle to see, and hither ran  
With other stranger marvels to impart;  
For, Princess! when he touched the blazing grass  
He was not burned, and water flows for him  
At will, or ceases flowing. And this, too,  
The strangest thing of all, did I behold:  
He took some faded leaves and flowers up  
And idly handled them, but while his hands  
Toyed with them, lo! they blossomed forth again  
With lovelier life than ever, and fresh green,

Straight on their stalks ! These marvels have I seen  
And hastened back to tell thee, Mistress dear."

But when she knew such wonders of the man,  
More certainly she deemed those acts and gifts  
Betokened Nala ; and, so minded, full  
Of trust to find her lord in Vahuka,  
With happier tears and softening voice she said  
To Keshinî : " Run yet again, my girl !  
And, while he wots not, from the kitchen take  
Meat he hath dressed and bring it here to me."  
So went the maid, and, waiting secretly,  
Broke from the mess a morsel, hot and spiced,  
And bearing it with faithful swiftness, gave  
To Damayantî. She (O Kuru King !)  
That knew so well the dishes dressed by him,  
Touched—tasted it—and, laughing, weeping, cried,  
Beside herself with joy : " Yes, yes ! 'tis he !  
That charioteer is Nala ! " Then, a-pant—  
Even while she washed her mouth \*—she bade the  
maid

\* Damayantî would not neglect the religious obligation to wash the lips after eating, although in a moment of such emotion.

Go with the children twain to Vahuka ;  
Who, when he saw his little Indrasen  
And Indrasena, started up and ran,  
And caught, and folded them upon his breast,  
Holding them there, his darlings, each as fair  
As children of the gods : then, quite undone  
With love and yearning, loudly sobbed the Prince.

Until,—perceiving Keshinī, who watched,—  
Shamed to be known, he set his children down,  
And said : “ In sooth, good friend, this lovely pair  
So like mine own are, that, at seeing them,  
I am surprised into these foolish tears.  
Thou comest here too often ; men will think  
Thee light, or me : remember we are here  
Strangers and guests. Go thy ways, girl ! in peace ! ”

---

BUT seeing that great trouble of his soul,  
Lightly came Keshinī and pictured all  
To Damayantī. She, burning to know  
If truly this were Nala, bade the maid

Seek the Queen's presence, saying this for her :

"Mother ! long watching Vahuka, I deem  
The charioteer is Nala ! One doubt lives,—  
His altered form. I must myself have speech  
With Vahuka ; thou, therefore bid him come,  
Or suffer me to seek him. Be this done  
Forthwith, good mother, whether known or not  
Unto the Maharaja."

When she heard,

The Queen told Bhima what the Princess prayed,  
Who gave consent ; and having thus good leave  
From father and from mother (O my King !)  
Command was sent that Vahuka be brought  
Where the court-ladies lodged.

So met those twain !

And when Prince Nala's gaze fell on his wife,  
He stood with beating heart and tearful eyes :  
And when sweet Damayantī looked on him,  
She could not speak, for anguish of keen hope  
To have him close ; but sate there, mute and wan,



Wearing a sad-hued cloth, her lustrous hair  
Falling unbanded, and the mourning-mark  
Stamped with grey ashes on her lovely brow.

Then, when she found a voice, these were the  
words

That came from her: "Didst ever, Vahuka!—  
If Vahuka thy name be, as thou sayest,—  
Know one of noble nature, honourable,  
Who in the wild woods left his wife asleep,—  
His innocent fond wife, weary and worn?  
Knowest thou the man? I'll say his name to thee;  
'Twas Nala, Raja Nala! Ah! and when  
In any thoughtless hour had I once wrought  
The smallest wrong that he should leave me so  
There in the wood by slumber overcome?  
Before the gods I chose him for my lord,  
The gods themselves rejecting: tell me how  
This Prince could so abandon in her need  
His true, his loving wife, she who did bear  
His babes,—abandon her to whom he swore,  
My hand clasped, in the sight of all the gods,



Of Agni's self: 'Thy true lord I will be!'

Thou saidst it; where is now that promise fled?"

While thus she spake (O Conqueror of thy Foes!)  
Fast from her eyes the woe-sprung waters ran;  
And Nala, seeing those night-black loving eyes  
Reddened with weeping, seeing her falling tears,  
Brake forth: "Ah! that I lost my throne and realm  
In dicing, was not done by deed of mine:  
'Twas Kali wrought it! Kali, O my wife!  
Drive me to leave thee! Therefore, long ago  
That evil one was stricken by the ban  
Which thou didst utter, wandering in the wood,  
Desolate, night and day grieving for me.  
Possessing me he dwelt; but, cursed by thee,  
Tortured he dwelt, consuming with thy words  
In fierce and fiercer pain, as when is piled  
Brand upon burning brand. But he is gone!  
Patience and penance have o'ermastered him.  
Princess! the end is reached of our long woes!  
That evil one being parted, freeing me,  
See, I am here! and wherefore would I come

Fairest ! except for thee ? Yet answer this ;  
How should a wife, right-minded to her lord,—  
Her own and lawful lord,—compass to choose  
Another love, as thou, that tremblest, didst ?  
Thy messengers over all regions ran  
By the king's name proclaiming : ' Bhima's child  
A second husband chooseth for herself,  
Whomso she will, as pleaseth, being free.'  
Those shameless tidings brought the Raja here  
At headlong speed—and me ! ”

Tenderly smiled

Damayantî through her tears, with faltering lips  
And joined palms answering her aggrieved Prince :  
“ Judgest thou me guilty of such a sin ?  
When for thy sake I put the gods aside,  
Thee did I choose, Nishadha ! my one lord.  
In quest of thee did all those Brahmans range  
In all ten regions, telling all one tale,  
Taught them by me ; and so Parnâda came  
To Koshala, where Rituparna dwells,  
And found thee in his house, and spoke to thee

Those words, and had thy gentle answer back.  
Mine the device was, Prince! to bring thee quick;  
For well I wist no man in all this world  
Could in one day the fleetest coursers urge  
A hundred yojanas save thee, dear Prince!  
I touch thy feet and tell thee this is truth;  
And true it is that never any wrong  
Against thee, even in fancy, have I dreamed.  
Witness for me, as I am loyal and pure,  
The ever-shifting, all-beholding Air,  
That wanders o'er the earth; let him withdraw  
My breath and slay me, if I sinned in aught!  
Witness for me yon golden Sun which goes  
With bright eye over us; let him withhold  
Warm life and kill me, if I sinned in aught!  
Witness for me the white Moon, whose pale spell  
Is on all flesh and spirit; let that orb  
Deny me peace and end me, if I sinned!  
These be the Watchers and the Testifiers,  
The three chief Gods that rule the three wide  
worlds;  
I cry unto them! let them speak for me;

And thou shalt hear them answer for my faith,  
Or once again, this day, abandon me."

Then Vayu shewed—the all-enfolding Air—  
And spake: "Not one wrong hath she wrought thee,  
Prince!

I tell thee sooth, the treasure of her truth  
Faultless and undefiled she hath kept,  
By us regarded, and sustained by us  
These many days. Her tender plot it was,  
Planned for thy sake, which brought thee; since who  
else

Could in one day drive fivescore yojanas?  
Nala! thou hast thy sweet leal wife again;  
Thou, Damayantī! hast thy Nala back:  
Away with doubtings! take her to thy breast,  
Thrice-happy Prince!"

And while great Vayu spake,  
Look! there showered flowers down out of the sky  
Upon them; and the drums of heaven beat  
Beautiful music; and a gentle wind,—



Fragrant, propitious—floated, kissing them.  
But Nala, when he saw these things befall,—  
Wonderful, gracious,—when he heard that Voice  
Divinely sounding (Lord of Bhârat's line!)  
Yielded all doubt of his delightful love.  
Then cast he round about his neck the cloth—  
Unstained by earth, enchanted—and (O King!)  
Called the great snake to memory : whereupon  
His proper self returned. Bhima's fair child  
Saw her dear lord his stately form resume.  
“ Ah, Nala ! Nala ! ” cried she, while her arms  
Clasped him and clung ; and Nala to his heart  
Pressed that bright lady—glowing, as of old,  
With princely majesty. Their children twain  
Next he caressed ; while she, at happy peace,  
Her beautiful glad face laid on his breast,  
Sighing with too much joy. And Nala stood  
A great space silent, gazing on her face,  
Sorrow-stamped still, her long deep-lidded eyes,  
Her melting smile : himself 'twixt joy and woe.

Afterwards, all that story of the Prince,



And all of Damayantī, Bhima's queen  
Told to the Maharaja joyously ;  
And Bhima said : " To-morrow will I see—  
When Nala hath his needful offerings made—  
Our daughter and this wandering lord well knit."

But all that night they sat, hand clasped in  
hand,  
Rejoicing, and relating what befell  
In the wild wood, and of the woeful times.  
And afterwards in Bhima's royal house  
Serenely dwelled the Princess and the Prince,  
Each making for the other peaceful joy.  
So, in the fourth year, Nala was rejoined  
To Damayantī, comforted and free,  
Restful, attained, tasting delights again.  
Also the glad Princess, gaining her lord,  
Laid sorrows by, and blossomed out anew,  
As doth the laughing earth when the rain falls,  
Bringing her unseen hidden treasures forth  
Of blade and flower and fruit. The ache was gone,  
The loneliness and load ! Heart-full of ease

Lovelier she grew and brighter, like the moon  
Mounting at midnight in the cloudless blue.

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THAT night being spent, Prince Nala in his state  
Led forth Vidarbha's pride before the court;  
And Bhima, in an hour found fortunate,  
Re-wed those married lovers. Dutifully  
Nala paid homage to the Maharaj,  
And reverently did Damayantī bow  
Before her father. He the Prince received  
With grace and gladness, as a son restored,  
Making fair welcome, and with words of praise  
Exalting Damayantī, tried and true;  
Which in all dignity Prince Nala took,  
Returning, as was meet, words honourable.  
Thereat into the city spread the noise  
Of this rejoicing; all the townspeople,  
Learning of Nala joyously returned,  
Made all their quarters gay with float of flags,  
Flutter of cloths and garlands; sprinkled free

The king's ways with fresh water and with cups  
Of fragrant flowers, and hung long wreaths of flowers  
From door to door the white street-fronts before ;  
And decked each temple-porch, and went about  
The altar-gods.

When Rituparna heard  
How Vahuka is Nala in disguise,  
And of the meeting, right-rejoiced at heart  
That Raja grew. And being softly prayed  
By Nala favourable thoughts, the king  
Made royal and gentle answer, with like grace  
By Nala met. To whom spake Rituparn :  
"Joy go with thee and her, happily joined !  
But say, Nishadha ! wrought I anything  
Wrongful to thee whilst sojourning unknown  
Within my walls ? If any words or deeds,  
Purposed or purposeless, have vexed thee, friend !  
For one and all thy pardon grant to me !"

And Nala answered : "Never act or word  
The smallest, Raja ! need'st thou to excuse !

If this were otherwise, thy slave was I,  
And might not question, but must pardon thee.  
Yet good to me thou wert, princely and just,  
And kin thou art; and friendly from this time  
Deign thou to be. Happily was I lodged,  
Well tended, well befriended, in thy house;  
In mine own palace never better stead!  
The skill in steeds which pleased thee, that is mine;  
And, Raja! I will give it all to thee,  
If thou be'st minded."

So Nishadha taught

All his great gift in horses to the king,  
Who heard each rule approved, and ordinance;  
And having gained this knowledge, gave in turn  
His deepest lore of numbers and the dice  
To Nala, afterwards departing home  
To his own place, another charioteer  
Driving his steeds; and Rituparna gone,  
Not long did Nala dwell in Bhima's town.



WHEN one moon he had dwelled there, (taking leave,) Nishadha to his city started forth  
With chosen train. A shining car he drove;  
And elephants sixteen, and fifty horse,  
And footmen thirty score, came in the rear.  
Swiftly did Nala journey, making earth  
Quake with his flying car, and wrathfully  
With quick steps entered he his palace doors.  
The son of Vīrasena, Nala, stood  
Once more before the gamester Pushkara!  
Spake he: "Play yet again! much wealth is mine,  
And that, all which I have—yea, my Princess—  
Set I for stakes. Set thou this realm and throw!  
My mind is fixed a second chance to try,  
And, Pushkara! we will play for all or none.  
Who wins his throne and treasures from a Prince  
Must stand the hazard of the counter-cast;  
This is the accepted law. If thou dost blench,  
The next game we will play is 'life or death'  
In chariot fight, when, or of thee or me  
One shall lie satisfied: 'Descended realms



By whatsoever means are to be sought,  
The sages say, 'by whatsoever won.'  
Choose therefore, Pushkara! which way of these  
Shall please thee! either meet me with the  
dice,  
Or with thy bow confront me in the field."

When Pushkara that heard, lightly he smiled,  
Concluding victory sure; and to the Prince  
Answered exulting: "*Dishtya!*\* hast thou gained  
Stakes for a counter-game, Nishadha, now?  
*Dishtya!* shall I have my hard-won prize,  
Sweet Damayantī? *Dishtya!* didst thou come  
In kissing-reach again of thy fair wife?  
Soon, in thy new gold splendid, she shall shine  
Before all men beside me, as in heaven  
On Sakra waits the loveliest Apsarā.  
See now, I thought on thee, I looked for thee,  
Ever and ever, Prince! There is no joy  
Like casting in the game with such as thee.  
And when to-day I win thy blameless one,

\* An exclamation of pleasure and surprise.

The smooth-limbed Damayantī, then shall be  
What was to be, and I can rest content;  
For always in my heart her beauty lives."

Listening the idle talk that babbler poured,  
Angry Prince Nala fain had lopped away  
His head with vengeful khudga, but unmoved,  
Albeit the wrath blazed in his bloodshot eyes,  
He made reply: "Play! mock me not with jests;  
Thou wilt not jest when I have cast with thee!"

Then was the game set, and the Princes threw,  
Nala and Pushkara; and—the numbers named—  
By Nala was the hazard gained: he swept  
His brother's stake,—gems, treasure, kingdom,—off;  
At one stroke all the mighty venture won.

Then quoth that conquering Prince to Pushkara,  
Scornfully smiling: "Mine is now once more  
Nishadha's throne; mine is this realm again,  
Its curse plucked forth; Vidarbha's glory thou,  
Outcast! shall ne'er so much as look upon!  
Fool! who art now become her bond and slave

Not by thy gifts that evil stroke was wrought  
Wherefrom I fled before; 'twas Kali's spell,  
Albeit thou knew'st not, fool! o'ermastered me.  
Yet will I visit not in wrathful wise  
My wrong on thee; live as thou wilt! I grant  
Wherewith to live, and set apart henceforth  
Thy proper goods and substance, and fit food.  
Nay, doubt not I shall show thee favour too,  
And be in friendship with thee, if thou wilt,  
Who art my brother. Peace abide with thee!"

Thus all-victorious Nala comforted  
His brother and embraced him, sending him  
In honour to his town; and Pushkara—  
Gently entreated—to Nishadha spake,  
With folded palms and humbled face, these words:  
"Unending be thy glory! may thy bliss  
Last and increase for twice five thousand years,  
Who grantest me wherewith to live, just lord!  
And where to dwell." Thereafter, well bested,  
Pushkara sojourned with the Prince one moon,  
So to his town departed, heart-content,

With slaves and foot-soldiers and followers,  
Gay as a rising sun (O Bhârat's Glory !):  
Thus sent he Pushkara, rich and safe, away.

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Then, with flags and drums and jewels, robed and  
royally arrayed,  
Nala into fair Nishadha entry high and dazzling  
made ;  
At the gates the Raja halting, spake his people words  
of love,  
Gathered were they from the city, gathered from the  
field and grove ;  
From the mountain and the maidan, all athrill with  
joy to see  
Nala come to guard his children. " Happy now our days  
will be,"  
Said the townsfolk, said the elders, said the villagers ;  
" O king !"  
Standing all with palms upfolded : " peace and fortune  
thou wilt bring  
To thy city, to thy country ; boundless welcome do we  
give,

As the gods in heaven to Indra when with them He  
comes to live."

After, when the show was ended, and the city, calm  
and glad,  
Rest from tumult of rejoicing and its flood of feasting  
had,  
Girt with shining squadrons Nala fetched his Pearl of  
Women home :  
Like a queen did DamayantĪ back unto her palace  
come ;  
By the Maharajah Bhima, by that mighty monarch  
sent  
Royally, with countless blessings, to her kingdom in  
content :  
There, beside his peerless Princess and his children,  
bore he sway  
Godlike; even as Indra ruling 'mid the bliss of Nandana.  
Bore he sway, my noble Nala, princeliest of all lords  
who reign  
In the lands of Jambudwipa, winning power and fame  
again ;



Ruling well his realm re-conquered, like a just and  
perfect king,  
All the appointed gifts bestowing, all the rites  
remembering.

END OF NALA AND DAMAYANTĪ.

## THE ENCHANTED LAKE.

From the *Vana Parva* of the Mahábhárata, page 825, line  
17,305, of the Calcutta 4to text.

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*[In the section preceding the five Pandu Princes have been wandering in the forest, greatly distressed for want of water. The concluding portion of this translation illustrates a passage in my previously published version of the "Swargârohana," where the god Dharma praises the King Yudhisthira for his equity and self-denial.]*

THEN Yudhisthira spake to Nakula :

"Thou Son of Madri! climb upon a tree,  
And look to all ten quarters, if, by chance,  
Water be nigh, or plants which love the pool;  
Thy brothers faint with thirst."

So Nakula

Clomb a tall tree ; and looking, cried aloud,  
“ Green leaves and water plants I see, which love  
The marish and the pool ; also, I hear  
The cry of cranes ; yonder will water lie ! ”

“ Go ! ” said the King, “ and fetch for us to drink,  
Filling thy quiver. ”

Then sped Nakula,

Obeying Yudhisthira with swift feet,  
And found a crystal pool brimmed to the bank :  
The great red-crested cranes stalked on its marge.  
And down he flung to drink ; but a Voice cried,  
“ Beware to drink, rash youth ! ere thou hast made  
Answers to such things as I ask of thee ;  
The law of this fair water standeth thus :  
Arise, and hear, and speak ; afterwards drink,  
And fill thy quiver. ”

But the eager Prince

Being so parched, quaffed deep, not heeding him,

The Yaksha of the place, and thereupon  
Fell lifeless in the reeds.

So when they looked  
To see him coming, and he tarried long,  
Again spake Yudhishthira: "Nakula  
Lingers too much, my brothers!—Sahadev!  
Go thou; and bring him back, and bring to drink."

"I go," quoth Sahadev; and sought the pool,  
And saw the water, and saw Nakula  
Prone on the earth. Then mightily he grieved,  
Spying the Prince outstretched; yet, all so fierce  
His drouth was, that he ran and flung him down,  
Making to quaff; when, once again, the Voice  
Sounded, "Beware to drink, ere thou dost give  
Answer to what things I will ask of thee;  
This is the law of me, who am the Lord  
Of the fair water; rise, and hear, and speak;  
Then thou shalt drink, and draw."

Yet, so the stress  
Of thirst o'ercame him, that he heeded not,

But drank, and rose, and—reeled among the reeds  
Lifeless.

Then, once again, great Kuntî's son  
Spake, saying : " O Arjuna ! Fear of foes !  
These, our twain brethren, tarry : go thyself,  
And speed, and bring them back, and bring to drink ;  
Our trust thou art, for we are sore distressed."

Which hearing, Gudâkeśa \* seized his bow  
And arrows, and with drawn sword sought the pool.  
But coming thither saw those heroes stretched—  
His brethren, best of men,—in deadly swoon,  
Or dead indeed ; and deep distraught he stood,  
Seeing them thus. All round the wood he gazed,  
With lifted bow, and arrow on the string,  
Seeking some foe ; but when none came in sight,  
So wild his thirst was, and the pool so clear,  
He bent his knee to drink, but bending, heard  
That Voice cry, " Dost thou this without my leave ?  
Despite me, Kuntî's son ! thou canst not drink,  
And shalt not, till thou makest answers good

\* " He of the knotted locks," a name of Arjuna.



Unto my asking; then may'st thou be free,  
Oh, born of Bhârata! to drink and draw."

Thus sternly stayed, the Prince exclaimed in wrath:  
"Come forth and show thyself, and fight with me!  
Pierced by my arrows thou shalt yield the pool."  
Then shot he shafts this way and that; and spoke  
Those spells which make a feathered barb fly straight;  
And darts he flung, of magic might, which find  
Th' escaping foe, tracking his winding feet;  
*Karnis, Narâchas, Nâlikas* he threw,  
That angry Prince, covering the sky and wood  
With searching steel. Thereat the Voice anew  
Mock'd him, low-laughing: "Son of Pritha! vain  
Thine anger is; answer me fair, and drink;  
But if thou drinkest ere thou answerest,  
Thou shalt not live." Yet was his throat so parched  
The Prince regarded not; and stooped, and drank,  
And fell down dead.

Then Yudhishthira spake:

"Bhima! thou Terror of thy foes! see now!

Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadev are gone  
To fetch us water; but they come not back.  
Seek them, and bring to drink."

And Bhima said,

"So be it;" and he went unto the place  
Where those, his mighty-hearted brethren, lay.  
But when he saw them—all three—dead and stark,  
Sore grieved that long-armed Lord, and gazed around,  
Deeming some Yaksha or some Rakshasa  
Had wrought their doom, and chafing for the fight.  
"But first," quoth he, "'twere good to drink,"—so  
sore

The drouth oppressed,—and to the pool he sped,  
Thinking to quaff, when yet again that Voice  
Echoed, "Dare not to drink—so stands the law  
Of this fair water; answer first—then drink!"  
But Bhima, parched and haughty, answered naught,  
Lapping the sweet wave; and in lapping fell.

Then, long time left alone, Kuntî's wise son  
Uprose—great Yudhisthira—sorrowful,

Perplexed in thought ; and strode into the wood :  
A leafy depth, where never foot was heard  
Of man, but shy deer roamed, and shaggy bears  
Rustled, and jungle-hens clucked in the shade ;  
With tall trees crowded, in whose crown the bees  
Swarmed buzzing, and strange birds builded their  
    nests.

Through this green darkness wending, Yudhisthir  
Passed to the pool, and marked its silver face  
Shine in the light, rimmed round with golden cups  
Of lotus-blossoms, all as if 'twere made  
By Viswakarma, architect divine ;  
And all its gleaming shallows and bright bays  
With water-plants were broken, lilies, reeds ;  
And framed about with ketuk-groves, and clumps  
Of sweet rose-laurel and the sacred fig ;  
Insomuch that the King stood wondering there,  
Albeit heart-sorrowful.

For there he saw,  
Stretched dead together—as the world's lords die,  
Indra and all, at every Yuga's end—

His warrior brethren. There Arjuna lay,  
Beside his bow and arrow; Bhima there,  
With Nakula and Sahadev; each void  
Of life and motion; and beholding these,  
His soul sank, and he fetched a grievous sigh.  
Bitterly at that sight lamented he,  
Saying, "Ah, Bhima! O my brother! named  
From the grim wolf; vain is the vow thou mad'st  
To break the thigh of fell Duryodhana  
In battle with thy mace. Dead art thou now,  
And those words wind. Brother and faithful friend!  
Who wast so princely-hearted, and upheld'st  
The fortune of the Kurus! vows of men  
Fail oftentimes, being blind; but this of thine  
Was noble, wherefore hath it borne not fruit?  
O Dhananjaya! Conqueror of wealth!  
My joy, my brave Arjuna! at thy birth  
The glad gods said to Kuntî: 'This thy son  
Shall be like Indra with the thousand eyes.'  
And northwards of the Paripatra hills  
All people cried: 'Here is the chief shall bring  
The glory back to us, having such strength

That in the battle none will make him fly,  
And none shall stand when he pursueth.' How—  
Ah, Jishnu!—how is this befallen here,  
Killing those hopes with thee,—with thee, whose love  
Made all our dangers sweet? And Sahadev,  
And Nakula! so valiant in the fight,  
So high and gallant, gifted like the gods,  
How have ye fallen? who could conquer you?  
Is my heart stone that now it breaketh not,  
Seeing these great twins gone, the first of men,  
Heroes, the half of whose renowned work  
Was yet to do? Ye knew the Shastras—knew  
The times and places and observances,  
And kept the rites; how lie ye on the earth,  
Unconquered ones! thus slain, thus overcome,  
And not a wound to show—nay! but the strings  
Not slipped into the notches of your bows?"

So broke the sorrow forth from Yudhishthir  
Beholding all four brethren lying still,  
Prone, like four corpses set asleep by Death;  
Much grieved he, and the marvel chilled his blood:



Nor wist he, though so wise, whither to look  
For that which slew them. Yet, close-pondering,  
Unto himself he spake: "No hurts they bear  
Made by a mortal weapon, nor is print  
Of footmark nigh, save theirs; this is some Bhut!  
Some Spirit of the Waste!—But let me drink,  
And afterward consider; it may be  
The vile Duryodhana hath drugged the pool,  
By counsel of Gandhâra's king; the wise  
Trust never him with senses unsubdued,  
To whom things lawful and unlawful count  
One and the same; yea! but this thing may be  
Wrought by hid hatred of Duryodhana."

Thus mused the King, but murmured presently:  
"Pure and unsullied seems the water; fresh  
My brothers' faces are; no poison-stain  
Mars limb or lip: 'tis Yama's self hath come,  
The conqueror of all, and slain them here,  
Whom none but he dared strike, being so strong."

So saying, to the brink he drew, athirst,  
And stooped to drink;—when, close at hand, he heard

A bird's cry, and the Yaksha, taking shape,  
Spake: "A grey crane I am, feeding on fish  
And water-weeds; 'tis I have sent yon four  
Unto the regions of the dead, and thou  
Shalt go, the fifth, great Raja! following them,  
Except thou makest answers fair and good  
To all that I shall ask. Dare not to drink,  
Thou Son of Kunti! for my law is strong;  
Answer; and afterwards, drink thou, and draw!"

Spake Yudhisthir: "Who art thou? Art thou  
chief

Of Rudras, or of Vâsus, or Maruts?  
Tell me! No bird wrought thus, unless a bird  
Might overthrow Himavân, and the peaks  
Of Paripatra, or the Vindhya crags,  
Or Malabar's black ghâts. Ah! terrible  
And mighty One, this is a dread deed wrought!  
This is a marvel, if thou slewed'st those  
Whom Gods, and Gandharvas, and Asuras,  
And Demons dared not face in fight. I know  
Naught of thy mind, nor if thou didst this thing

Desiring aught ; wonder and fear possess  
My burdened heart ! I pray thee, show thyself,  
Reveal what God thou art, who hauntest here."

"Yea, King !" came answer ; "I am not a bird  
Wading the shallows, but a Yaksha dread,  
And I, as now thou seest me, killed these four."

Raja ! (so Vaisampayana went on),  
When Yudhisthira heard those scornful words,  
And saw that form, backward he drew a space,  
Gazing upon the Shape with eyes of flame,  
Bulked like a crag, with towering head which topped  
The fan-palms waving near ; shining as shines  
The glory of the sun, not to be borne  
For splendour ; coloured like an evening cloud,  
And like a cloud still shifting. Then it spake,  
That monstrous Shade : "These four, though I forbade,  
Drank of the pool, despite me, and were slain.  
Drink not, O King ! if thou desirest life ;  
O Son of Pritha, drink not ! Kuntî's child !  
Answer my questionings, then drink, and live !"

"I would not break thy rule," quoth Yudhisthir;  
"The wise have said, 'Keep everywhere the law,'  
And, Yaksha! wherein thou wilt question me  
None can speak better than he understands;  
So, what I know, that will I answer. Ask!"

Then thus he questioned, and the King replied:—

*Yaksha.*

What teacheth division 'twixt spirit and frame?  
And which is the practice assisteth the same?  
What finally freeth the spirit? And how  
Doth it find a new being? Resolve me these now.

*King.*

The Veds division plainly show;  
By worship rightly man doth go;  
Dharma the soul will surely free;  
In Truth its final rest shall be.

*Yaksha.*

How cometh a man in the Veds to be wise?

What bringeth the knowledge of God to his eyes?  
What learning shall teach him the uttermost lore?  
And whence will he win it? Reply to these four.

*King.*

By hearing Scripture man acquires;  
By doing it his soul aspires;  
The utmost lore is conquering sense,  
Which cometh of obedience.

*Yaksha.*

How wendeth a Brahman to heavenly rest?  
And what is the work that befitteth him best?  
And which are the sins that disgrace him? and why  
Doth he know himself humble and mortal? Reply!

*King.*

Reading the Vedas leads to rest;  
Pure meditation fits him best;  
Slander and cruelty defame;  
And Death marks him and all the same.



*Yaksha.*

Who is it that gifted with senses to see,  
To hear, taste, smell, handle; and seeming to be  
Sagacious, strong, fortunate, able, and fair;  
Hath never once lived, though he breatheth the  
air?

*King.*

The man who, having, doth not give  
Out of his treasure to these five—  
Gods, guests, and Pitris, kin and friend;  
Breathes breath, but lives not to life's end?

*Yaksha.*

What thing in the world weigheth more than the  
world?  
What thing goeth higher than white clouds are curled?  
What thing flieth quicker than winds o'er the main?  
And what groweth thicker than grass on the plain?

*King.*

A mother's heart outweighs the earth ;  
A father's fondness goeth forth  
Beyond the sky ; thought can outpass  
The winds, and woes grow more than grass.

*Yaksha.*

Whose eyes are unclosed, though he slumbers all  
day ?  
And what's born alive without motion ? and, say,  
What moveth, yet lives not ? and what, as it goes,  
Wastes not, but still waxes ? Resolve me now  
those.

*King.*

With unclosed eyes a fish doth sleep ;  
And new-laid eggs their place will keep ;  
Stones roll ; and streams, that seek the sea,  
The more they flow the wider be.

. . . . .

*Yaksha.*

What help is the best help to virtue? and, then,  
What way is the best way to fame among men?  
What road is the best road to heaven? and how  
Shall a man live most happy? Resolve me these now.

*King.*

Capacity doth virtue gain;  
Gift-giving will renown obtain;  
Truth is to heaven the best of ways;  
And a kind heart wins happy days."

*Yaksha.*

What soul hath a man's which is his, yet another's?  
What friend do the gods grant, the best of all others?  
What joy in existence is greatest? and how  
May poor men be rich and abundant? say thou.

*King.*

Sons are the second souls of man,  
And wives the heaven-sent friends; nor can

Among all joys health be surpassed ;  
Contentment answereth thy last."

*Yaksha.*

Which Virtue of virtues is first ? and which bears  
Most fruit ? and which causeth the ceasing of tears ?"

*King.*

To bear no malice is the best ;  
And Reverence is fruitfullest ;  
Subduing self sets grief at rest.

*Yaksha.*

Still, tell me what foeman is worst to subdue ?  
And what is the sickness lasts lifetime all through ?  
Of men that are upright, say which is the best ?  
And of those that are wicked, who passeth the rest ?"

*King.*

Anger is man's unconquered foe ;  
The ache of greed doth never go ;

Who loveth most of saints is first ;  
Of bad men cruel men are worst."

*Yaksha.*

Good Prince ! tell me true, is a Brahmana made  
By birthright ? or shall it be rightfully said,  
If he reads all the Veds, and the Srutis doth  
know,  
He is this ? or doth conduct of life make him so ?"

*King.*

O Yaksha ! listen to the truth :  
Not if a man do dwell from youth  
Beneath a Brahman's roof, nor when  
The Srutis known to holy men  
Are learned, and read the Vedas through,  
Doth this make any Brahman true.  
Conduct alone that name can give ;  
A Brahmana must steadfast live,  
Devoid of sin and free from wrong ;  
For he who walks low paths along,



Still keeping to the way, shall come  
Sooner and safer to his home  
Than the proud wanderer on the hill;  
And reading, learning, praying, still  
Are outward deeds which ofttimes leave  
Barren of fruit minds that believe.  
Who practises what good he knows  
Himself a Brahmana he shows;  
And if an evil nature knew  
The sacred Vedas through and through,  
With all the Srutis, still must he,  
Lower than honest Sudra be,  
To know and do the right, and pay  
The sacrifice, in peace alway,  
This maketh one a Brahmana."

*Yaksha.*

Right skilfully hast thou my questionings met,  
Most pious of princes and learned! but yet  
Resolve me who liveth though death him befall?  
And what man is richest and greatest of all?

*King.*

Dead though he be, that mortal lives  
Whose virtuous memory survives;  
And richest, greatest, that one is  
Whose soul—indifferent to bliss  
Or misery, to joy or pain,  
To past or future, loss or gain—  
Sees with calm eyes all fates befall,  
And, needing nought, possesseth all.

Then spake the Yaksha: "Wondrously, O King!  
Hast thou replied, and wisely hast fulfilled  
The law of this fair water; therefore drink!  
And choose which one of these thy brethren dead  
Shall live again."

So Yudhishthira said,

"Let Nakula, O Yaksha! have his life—  
My dark-browed brother with the fiery eyes—  
Straight like a Tala-tree, broad-chested, tall,  
That long-armed lord."

“ But see where Bhima lies  
Dead,” spake the Spirit, “ dearest unto thee ;  
And where Arjuna sleeps, thy guard and guide !  
Why dost thou crave the life of Nakula—  
Not thine own mother’s son—in Bhima’s stead,  
Who had the might of countless elephants,  
Whom all the people called thy ‘ Well-Beloved ? ’  
Or wouldst thou see Nakula alive again  
In place of great Arjuna, thine own blood,  
Whose valour was the tower of Pandavas ? ”

But Yudhisthira answered : “ Faith and right,  
Being preserved, save all, and, being lost,  
Leave nought to save : these therefore I will set  
First in my heart. Faithful and right it is  
To choose by justice, putting self aside.  
Let Nakula live, O Yaksha ! for men call  
King Yudhisthira ‘ just ; ’ nor will he lose,  
Even for love, that name ; make Nakula live !  
Kuntî and Madrî were my father’s wives ;  
Shall one be childless, and the other see  
Her sons returning ? Madrî is to me

As Kuntî, as my mother, at this hour ;  
As she who bore me she that bore the twins ;  
And justice shall she have, since I am judge ;  
Let Nakula live, thou Yaksha ! ”

Then the Voice

Sighed sweet, evanishing : “ Thou noblest Prince !  
Thou best of Bhârat’s line ! as thou art just,  
Lo ! all thy brethren here shall live again.”

## THE SAINT'S TEMPTATION.

[From the *Vana Parva* of the Mahábhárata, p. 565, line  
10,007, Calcutta 4to edition.]

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BORN of the White Doe, in the woods he dwelled,  
That sinless saint, pious and mild and pure,  
Sad-minded, solitary ; for his eyes  
Had never lighted on a human face  
Except his sire, Vibhandika's ; and thus  
Always young Rishyasringa's heart was set  
On sanctities (O King !).

At which far time  
Lomapád, friend of Dasarath, was lord  
In Anga ; and, 'tis told, spake falsely once  
Unto a Brahmana. But, thereupon



The Brahmanas fled from that dishonoured court ;  
So, when no priest was left, no Purohit,  
He of the thousand eyes, Indra, withheld  
His rains, whereby sore suffered all the folk ;  
And (O my King !) Lomapád sent in grief,  
Praying his wisest if they knew the cause  
Of Indra's wrath, and what should make Him rain.

Thus questioned, these took counsel ; and one  
spake—

A chief of sages—"O Superior Lord !  
The Brahmanas are angered for thy word  
Forsworn ; thou therefore make them fit amends,  
And hither bring Rishyasring, who dwells  
Alone amid the groves, holy and mild ;  
Whose eyes have never seen a woman's face ;  
Whose heart is pure. If the fair boy shall come,  
The clouds of Indra will let fall their drops  
That very day ; of this thing doubt ye not !"

Hearing their words the Raja purged his guilt  
With lavish gifts, soothing the Brahmanas ;

And when their hearts were won, he came again  
Unto his kingdom, making all folks glad.  
And, next, the Lord of Anga called his best  
Among the ministers to compass means  
How Rishyasringa might be brought; and those,  
Deep-read in Shastra, Artha, Niti, all,  
Counselled the wiles of woman;—whereupon  
A band of comely winsome girls were bid  
Unto the palace, skilled in arts to please;  
And the king said: "Beautiful damsels! bring  
Rishyasringa hither, that saint's son;  
Entice, allure, persuade: ye know men's hearts."  
But they, fearing the king, yet fearing more  
The saint's curse if they vexed him, one by one  
Answered: "Yea, Raja! hearts of men we know,  
But in this thing how can we serve thy will?"

Then one arose, white-haired and wrinkled deep,  
An ancient dame, who spake unto the king:  
"See, Maharaja! I will fetch this boy,  
Albeit an ocean of austerities.  
Do thou command that there be granted me

Means for my need, that so I may prevail,  
And bring the Rishi's son, this pearl of saints."

"What needest thou?" said he; and when he  
knew,

Much store of silver and of gold and gems  
He gave the dame, who from the ring of girls,  
Laughing, drew forth the fairest, wilfullest;  
And muttering "He will come!" passed to the woods.

And there she built—so Lomarsha went on—  
Not by the king's word, but her own device,  
A floating bower to swim upon the stream.  
Full sweet she fashioned it, from woven boughs  
Of verdure, interlaced with palms and vines,  
And clasped by climbing stems, and hung with fruit  
Golden and rosy, and with bright blooms decked;  
Afterwards on the river launched her boat—  
The damsel seated 'neath its leafy screen—  
So that it came with paddle, stream, and breeze,  
Through the trees stealing, down the silvery road,  
Softly and silent, to the Rishi's haunt;

Where lightly tripped the lovely girl ashore,  
And looking in his eyes, demurely spake :

“ O Muni ! is it peace with you ? are all the Rishis  
well ?

And have you roots and fruits enough ? and take you  
joy to dwell

All lonely in this hermitage, which I am come to  
see ?

And add you, day by day, dear saint ! unto your  
sanctity ?

And, Brahman ! doth your sire rejoice to watch you  
fast and pray ?

And do you sing, O Rishyasring ! the Vedas every  
day ? ”

Answered that blushing boy delightedly :

“ O unknown one ! who shinest like the splendour  
of a star,

Peace and good-will ! for due to thee my salutations  
are.

Accept, I pray thee, at my hands, the *Padya*,\* and  
this thrift

Of roots and fruits, as duty bids, a hermit's humble gift :  
And be thou pleased upon this mat of Kusa grass to sit,  
Or, better, let the black deer's skin be smoothly spread  
on it :

Fair is the day which bringeth thee ! Ah, sweet saint,  
where may be  
Thy hermitage, and what vow fills the holy hours of  
thee ? ”

Right archly answered him the laughing girl :

“ Oh, son of pious Kaśyapa ! my charming bower lies  
Under a mountain far removed from these austerities,  
Three yojanas away,—away ;—nor is it meet for me  
Thus to be revered, nor to touch this water, nor to  
see

A Rishi kneeling at my feet ; much otherwise my state !  
Love is the vow which fills my life and makes my  
heart elate.”

\* Water for the feet ; a necessary and graceful part of Hindoo hospitality.



Perplexed, yet radiant, the boy replied :

“What should I do to pleasure thee? I'll bring thee  
fruits we find

Within our groves, Bhallatakas, Ingudas with gold rind,  
Karushakas, Amalakas, Dhanwanas honey-sweet,  
Or Pippalas; see! these are here; wilt thou not take  
and eat?”

But smilingly she put them by, and reached  
Rare cakes to him, spiced as no hermit knows,  
Pleasant of taste, which the boy ate with joy.  
And on his neck and wrists lightly she hung  
Garlands of subtle-scented blooms; and crowned  
Her own bright brows; and drew a light robe on,  
Laughing; and so, with murmuring song, unbound  
Her body-cloth, and waving, weaving it,  
Paced the soft Kanduka with beating feet,  
And bosoms lithely swayed, as flower-cups sway  
When the wind shakes their clusters; at the last  
Danced to his side, and for a moment set  
Palm to his palm, and limb to limb, and lip

To trembling lip, and breast to beating breast :  
Then turned aside and drew the branches down  
Of Sarja, Tilak, and Aśoka trees,  
Plucking their buds, shameless and well-content,  
Because she saw love lighted in his heart.

For knowing well her triumph, and the saint  
Obtained,—once more she clasped her soft brown arms  
About him, and with eyes fixed on his eyes  
Withdrew ; having enkindled passion's flame  
Where only fires of sacrifice had burned.

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WHEN she was gone, young Rishyasringa stood  
As one some dream of glory leaves distraught,  
Spiritless ; then within his lonely cell  
Sate with face fixed through many silent hours,  
Her beauties meditating.

Presently

Vibhandaka, of Kaśyapa the son,  
Returned. Much insight of the Veds had bleared

His ancient orbs ; a thick pile covered him,  
Body and legs and arms, to the finger-ends :  
A holy man, purified, dedicate  
To contemplation. He, arriving, saw  
The lad in deep thought plunged, sitting apart,  
Dejected, fetching sigh on sigh, with glance  
Upturned. Whereat inquired Vibhandaka :  
" My child ! why hast thou gathered not the wood ?  
Didst thou perform the sacrifice to-day ?  
And didst thou lead the calf to suck the cow ?  
Why art thou sad ? I pray thee tell me true,  
Hath one been with thee here to-day ? "

The boy

Gave answer : " Yea ! a Brahmacharya came,  
His locks were braided and his comely form  
Seemed not too tall nor short ; fair-voiced he was,  
Coloured as is new gold, with broad bright eyes,  
Which were like lotus-blossoms. As gods shine  
So of his own divine grace glittered he.  
A glory had he like the sacred sun ;  
And, ah ! his dark deep glance ; and oh ! his hair

Tied up with blue ; sweet-smelling, lustrous, long !  
A necklace curled and clung about his neck  
Sparkling like lightning on a dusky sky ;  
And underneath his throat swelled forth to sight  
Two globes, flower-soft and smooth, fair-fashioned,  
large ;  
His waist so fined that back and front came close ;  
Below his hips outrounded wondrously ;  
A jewelled girdle hung above his thighs,  
And some strange tinkling ornaments adorned  
His feet. Also upon his arms were gems,  
Which chattered like the breast-beads of my string,  
Ah ! but more musically, when he moved ;  
'Twas as the songs of wild swans on the lake !  
The cloths he wore were goodly, not like mine,  
And when he spoke, those honeyed words which fell  
Gladdened my heart and passed into my soul,  
Deep—deep ! till dearer seemed it than the notes  
Of Koils piping ! Also, as the woods  
When in the Madhva month the breezes blow,  
Shake fragrance forth, so there did waft from him  
Sweet breaths on every air ! Over his brows



The locks sate smooth, drawn forward from his braids,  
And in his ears swung little painted stones  
Brighter than Chakravâka birds! Sometimes  
With skilful hand he tossed a fruit aloft,  
Which fell to earth, and bounding to his palm,  
Was beaten back again and yet again,  
Wondrous to see! while this and that way waved  
His body like a tree which the wind bends.  
Ah! while I saw him so, like a young god,  
My heart grew full! I worshipped that fair Saint:  
Full oft, too, he embraced me, holding me  
Close by the hair, and, drawing down my cheek,  
And, covering up my mouth with his soft mouth,  
Upon my lips made tender sounds; and this  
Wrought me strange joy! He would not willingly  
Accept 'foot-water,' nor the fruits I brought,—  
He had a vow was otherwise, he said,—  
But gave me unknown fruits, more delicate  
Than aught we ever taste of here; no rind  
They had, nor pulp like ours. Also he gave  
Sweet juices to me, which I drank, and felt  
A quickening glow, lifting my eyebrows up.



Those wreaths of scented blossoms strung with silk  
Are from his hand; he left them here, dear saint!—  
Who by his fasts, no doubt, so splendid shows—  
When he withdrew to seek his hermitage.  
Now he is gone, I am become as nought;  
My senses fail, my body burns! I ask  
Only to go to him, or else that he  
Should ever come to us. Father! demand  
His presence: learn his Brahmacharya's name!  
I wish to exercise with that wise man  
The penance they perform: I long to do it!  
My heart will break if I see him no more!"

Vibhandaka spake sternly: "Son! there walk  
Wonderful Rakshasâs in this our wood,  
Dreadful for strength and cunning comeliness;  
Ofttimes to interrupt our rites they seek;  
Ofttimes, with winsome wiles and beauteous shapes,  
Tempt saints to abandon Swarga's heavenly mark.  
He who will rule his mind and reach toward bliss  
With such makes no society, nor looks  
The way of these, the abominable, who snare

The pious. Yea, my son ! those drinks she gave  
Are evil and forbidden, and conduce  
To sin. Yon wreaths, moreover, must not lie  
Within a hermitage where Munis live ;  
For soul-compelling is their subtle scent.  
Nay, 'twas a Rakshasî !”

So did the sage  
Counsel that youthful saint, admonishing him,  
And afterwards set forth to seek the witch :  
But, nowhere finding her, came home again.

Yet it befell, upon another day,  
Vibhandaka went forth to pluck those fruits  
Which are most meet to make the sacrifice  
Of Śravan, and she came again, the girl,  
Silently shining through the trees. And he  
Saw her, and, seeing, utterly forgot  
Rishis and Rakshasîs, so joyed he was,  
So with strong love transported ; for she sighed  
“ Rishyasring ! ” and with that word he took  
Her palm, and led her to the lonely hut,  
Whose porch they entered.

Afterwards (O King !)

Laughingly did she win him to the bank  
With honeyed arts, and lightly him entrance,  
Floating and fondling down the silvery stream  
Until they came to Anga. There she drew  
The green boat in, and moored it 'neath the shade,  
Love's ark—plain to be seen, and by all folk  
Named *Navyāśrama*, 'The Floating Shrine.'

So Lomapād brought in the Rishi's son :  
And lo ! great Indra's wrath was gone ; the rain  
Burst o'er the land and drenched the thirsty fields ;  
But Rishyasringa to his forest cell  
Came back no more !

## THE BIRTH OF DEATH.

From the *Drona Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, line 2040,  
page 606, vol. iv., Calcutta 4to edition.

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[*The brave and virtuous son of Arjuna and Subhadra, the young Abhimanyu, has been slain in battle, after splendid exploits; and Prince Yudhishthira is bitterly bewailing that loss. "What is death? Whence is this death?" he exclaims. The sage Vyāsa thus replies to him:—*

L.

I WILL relate

An ancient story for thy comfort, Prince,  
By Narad told to King Akampana!  
For that great lord had lost his only son,

Which is of earthly woes hardest to bear.  
Thou, too, shalt learn how death began, and this  
Shall free thee from the ache of love bereaved.  
Hear the old story ; it is sweet to hear—  
Excellent, holy, purging sins away,  
Prolonging life because it stayeth grief ;  
Good for the heart and soul, strengthening the will,  
Best of auspicious scriptures. Nay, I say  
To tell or hear this read is all as if  
The blessed Veds were chanted ; it should be  
Said with the morning prayer for kings to con,  
If they will keep their children, realms, and wealth  
With minds at ease.

My son, in ages past,  
In the far Krita Yuga, lived this King  
Akampana. His foes beset him sore,  
And slew in fight Hari, his son, a Prince  
God Narayen's match, for might ; youthful and fair ;  
Skillful in arms, wise, pleasant—in the war  
Fearless as Sákra. But they hemmed him round,  
Striking such blows amidst his enemies,



That when he fell there lay about his corpse  
A bloody belt of chiefs and elephants.

Long mourned the King his sire, by night and day  
Weeping, knowing no joys, uncomforted ;  
Whom that most holy saint, great Narada,  
Hearing his grief, in pity visited.  
But when the King saw Narad entering,  
Uprose he from the dust, and clasped those feet,  
And poured his sorrows into those wise ears,  
Recounting all the battle, how 'twas lost,  
And how the Prince fell. "Ah ! my brave, fair  
son"—

So broke he forth—"Oh ! my most gallant boy !  
That wast upon our side like Indra's self  
For help, like Vishnu in thy shining mail,  
Slain art thou 'midst thy foes. Ah ! Bhagavan,  
Ah ! Rishi, he is gone ; my pride is dead !  
What is this death ? whence cometh it ? what curse  
Hath given it means and might and power to kill,  
Blasting the bloom of life ? Thou, who art wise,  
Tell me the truth of this ; I crave to know."

Then Narad, hearing his most piteous cry,  
That teacher of all truth, spake tenderly  
The ancient tale I tell, which whoso hears  
He shall not weep though his one son be dead.

Narada said: "Listen, thou long-armed king,  
And grieve no more when thou hast heard. At first,  
Long back in the beginning, He who rules,  
Almighty Shining Brahma, made what lives  
To be unchanged; so was there length of days  
Illimitable, but not growth in days  
Which comes by change; and Brahma, seeing His worlds  
Fixed in fair changelessness, waxed ill content,  
Bethinking to unmake what He had made,  
That good should pass to better. And there went,  
O monarch! from the discontent of Him—  
Bethinking how He should destroy to save—  
A flame, the spirit of His brooding thought,  
Which, filling all the regions, had consumed  
The heavens and earth and worlds from west to east—  
From north to south, the heavens and earth and worlds,  
With all their creatures—those which live and move,

And those which live unmoving, plants and trees.  
So was that thought of Brahma terrible.

But thereupon he of the matted locks,  
Hara—whom men do also Sthánu call,  
King of night-wandering ghosts, Shiva the god—  
Unto dread Brahma's presence straight repaired.  
Awful in sunlike majesty sat He;  
And seeing Hara at His feet, come there  
For love of living beings: "Son!" He said,  
"What need hath brought thee? Let the wish be known;  
That which thou dost desire, it shall be wrought;  
For thou art Sthánu, and thy will is mine."

Spake Hara: "O thou Light of all the Worlds!  
Thine are the worlds, and thou hast peopled them;  
And all things in their orders are by Thee,  
And in Thee live. Wilt thou not save Thine own?  
But now they fear to perish everywhere,  
Slain by this fire which flameth from Thy mood;  
And I, who see it, and who love them, come,  
Moved with compassion. Have thou mercy, Lord!"

Brahma replied : " I did not think to slay.  
Lo ! I am favourable. Life shall live :  
For love, not hate, this mood did move in me ;  
Because the Angel of the Earth hath come,  
Constantly praying : ' Father, lighten me !  
Make and unmake this burden sore to bear,  
My children, lest we multiply to harm.'  
Yet, having made them, how should I unmake,  
Seeing I gave gifts indestructible,  
Giving their lives ? I cannot slay, yet these  
Must change ; therefore that mood did move in me."

Spake Hara, " O Protector of the Worlds !  
Be favourable still, be wroth no more ;  
Let not the lives, moving and motionless,  
Perish, O Bhagavan ! Let there be henceforth  
Three states of time for children of the earth,  
The Past, the Present, and the Future ; these  
Let them possess, Thou Lord of All ! Thy mind  
Burneth in moving, and therewith a flame  
Proceeded, scorching mountains, rivers, lakes,  
Forests and beasts that dwell there, and the beings,

Moving and motionless, of all the earth.  
Ah ! Bhagavan, be thou then propitious ; yield  
Thine ill content which slayeth. This I crave,  
Also the flame, which hath proceeded forth  
By reason of it ; draw it back, dread Lord,  
Into Thyself ; from Thee it sprang ; Thou art  
Master to bless or ban. Make Thine acts bless  
These that are Thine to sweep away or save,  
These that must perish if Thou pity not,  
O Maker who unmakest ! I am here—  
The messenger of all the guardian gods  
Which keep thy worlds—beseeching Thee, Supreme,  
Destroy not that which Thou hast wrought so fair !  
For this at Thy great feet I bend and plead."

Hearing Mahâdev's prayer (quoth Narada)  
The awful Brahma gave consent, and drew  
Back to Himself that earth-devouring flame.  
Then He who maketh and unmaketh worlds  
Spake of the making and unmaking—how  
The purpose groweth so. And when the fire  
Was wholly quenched, and all His spirit still,



Lo ! Brahma meditated ; and there rose,  
Live from His thought, a Presence feminine—  
Delicate, tender, splendid ; with great eyes.  
Dark the sweet face was ; dark the stately limbs ;  
But beauty blossomed red on lip and breasts,  
And in her ears swung ear-rings of soft gold.  
She, being so born, drew backward from the throne,  
Awestruck to gaze upon those Gods. But He  
Who maketh and unmaketh spake to her  
Saying, " Thou Death, thou Mrityu—go, destroy  
Those who must die ! I have created thee  
Unto this work ; bring to appointed end  
The moving and unmoving ; kill and slay  
All creatures at their time. This is my will,  
Obey, and fear not."

Thus commanded, Death—

Fair Mrityu, with those eyes like lotuses—  
Spake not, but bowed her head and sobbed, her tears  
Fast welling ; so that on dread Brahma's hand  
Fell the bright tears ; for Brahma drew her close,  
Saying " I bid thee for the good of all"

## II.

But Narada went on : Then she assuaged  
Her sorrow, and replied, " Father and Lord ! "  
Clasping her palms across her beauteous breast,  
And trembling like a tendril in the wind—  
" Father and Lord," sighed Mrityu, " wherefore then  
Mad'st Thou me woman ? How shall I fulfil  
This dreadful duty, this injurious task ?  
I shall be guilty, I shall be defiled.  
Be gracious ; let this work light not on me !  
Why must they die ? the friend, the citizen,  
The son, the mother, father, brother, bride  
And bridegroom—all so happy, all so fair—  
Why should these be destroyed ? I am afraid  
To kill them ; I shall sadden at their tears,  
Grieve with their groans. Master of all ! dear God !  
Bid me not dwell with Yama, slaying men.  
I pray Thee rather give me leave to live  
In holy silences and pains and prayers.  
This boon I crave, great Father ; grant the boon ;  
And I, thy child, will go to Dhenuka,

Where I will dwell in sacred solitudes,  
Religious, worshipping thee. But, God of gods,  
I shall not have the heart to take away  
The dear lives of the dying creatures. Save,  
Save me from such a sin ! ”

Brahma replied :

“ *Mrityu* ! thou art created unto this,  
To make an end of all that lives. Go, child !  
Make them to end, each at his time ; spare none !  
Such is my will, and never otherwise ;  
Thou shalt be blameless, doing *Brahma*’s will.”

But she—thus *Narada* went on—stood there  
To slay reluctant, clasping pitying palms  
Across her breast, and lifting eyes of ruth  
To *Brahma*’s eyes. Thereat there spread in  
heaven

Silence a space, whilst *Death*, for love of men,  
Gazed on the face of God, and that dread face  
Waxed well contented ; and great *Brahma* smiled  
Looking upon His creatures, who therewith

Fared well throughout the three wide worlds, because  
The countenance of Him was glad again.

So passed she from the Almighty Presence, mute,  
This tender angel sent to slay mankind,  
Refusing still to slay; and forthwith went  
To Dhenuka, where, countless ages through,  
In meditation and rapt vows she stood  
Fixed like a rock. All for the love of men  
For sixteen padmas stood she, seeking grace,  
Withholding heart and soul from peace and joy;  
And afterward for padmas twenty-five  
Praying for men; and then through many more  
She sojourned with the creatures of the field,  
Praying for them. Next, upon Nanda's banks,—  
Nanda which flows cool, holy, crystal, pure,—  
Seven thousand years and one kept she firm fast,  
And afterwards went east to Kausiki,  
Where dews and airs of heaven were all her food;  
Until, accomplishing the pilgrimage,  
By Panchaganga and at Ganga's wave,  
Under the feet of sacred Himalay,  
And so to topmost Himalay, where gods

Have offered sacrifice, she, too, a god,  
Lay prostrate, praying, still as is a stone;  
And yet again at Naimish, Pushkara,  
Gokarna and Malaya, wheresoe'er  
The holiest places are, there sojourned she,  
Fasting and meditating, making vows  
For men to Brahma, suing him for them.

Whereby the Eternal Father of the worlds,  
Being well pleased—quoth Narad—called to her  
With kindly mind, saying, "My Mrityu!  
Why dost thou exercise such heavy vows?"

And gentle Death answered the Lord of life:  
"That I may never have, O Lord! to kill  
Thy creatures, and that they may dwell in peace,  
This thing I ever wish, this boon I crave.  
Master and Father! I did fear the guilt  
Of slaying, and I feared to disobey;  
Therefore I make these penances, Supreme!  
Comfort me who am Thine, and terrified;  
Forgive me, for I would be innocent;  
Have pity, Lord of lords! on me and these!"



Then He Who knows what was, is, and will be,  
Made mild reply : " Blood-guilty art thou not,  
O Mrityu ! if thou slayest these which live.  
What I have uttered, I have uttered. Vain  
Can never be my words. These are to die.  
Go, gentle spirit ! therefore, slay me these ;  
Slay all four orders of the things which live ;  
Thee shall the Eternal Virtue purify ;  
Thee shall the Mighty Ones, who guard my worlds,  
Succour and aid. Yama shall help thee ; plagues,  
Pestilence, dearth, shall be thy ministers ;  
And I, the Almighty God, before all gods  
Give thee this sign, that, being free from sin,  
Thou shalt be called ' Passionless,' *Nirajī*,  
She that doth slay for love, and slaying saves."

So once again, commanded past reply,  
Mrityu her meek palms folded o'er her breast,  
And bowed her brow, and answered : " If, dread Lord,  
This must be done, and I must be the means,  
Upon my head be put Thine high behest !  
Yet let it be Thy will I strike them not ;

Let their sins slay them, and die so with them.  
Avarice, ambitions, envies, calumnies,  
Wars, wraths, hates, conquests, follies, passions, plots  
Of mutual mischiefs—let those work 'Thy word  
And bring to end the beings suffering them."

"Thus it shall be," spake Brahma. "Go, fair child  
Fulfil My purpose, make death enter so ;  
Thou shalt be blameless now and evermore.  
See ! the bright tears that fell upon my hand  
From forth thine eyes, I turn to woes of flesh  
Which shall consume them—aches, diseases, griefs.  
Born of thy sorrow these will smite ; but, born  
Of thy compassion, these shall heal with peace,  
When the day cometh that each one must die.  
Fear not ! thou shalt be innocent ; thou art  
The solace as the terror of all flesh,  
Righteous and rightful, doing Brahma's will.  
Therefore fare forth and slay, making these end  
With pangs of passion, stings of wild desires,  
Vain sins which kill. Such shall thy virtue be ;  
And thou shalt purify thee by thyself,

Making the good wax and the evil wane  
By nature of the evil's self—by wrongs,  
By wrath, by lust, self-love, and sinfulness."

So, ever since that time—quoth Narada—  
Mrityu, no longer thinking to resist,  
Works the great will of God, and slays what lives,  
Taking the breath of creatures at life's close;  
Not with her own kind hand;—she doth not kill!  
By ills and pests and hurts which evil breeds—  
As many as those tender tears that rolled  
Forth from her eyes—they perish; so men call  
Their plagues *Vyâdhi*, that which "hunts" to death.

Wherefore, my King! said Narad, it is vain  
To mourn the dead. The elements divine,  
Which enter in at birth come forth at death.  
All changes, and the gods are mortal, too.  
But thou, lament no more thy princely son;  
He hath attained that excellent abode,  
Airy, invisible, which knows not time,  
Nor chance, nor any change. Weep not for him;

He sits with kings and heroes who are passed  
Into the everlasting happy house,  
Where no wars are, nor wounds; and good men dwell.

King! this is Death! this is that Mrityu!  
Thus—when the hour is come—the creatures end,  
Obeying the vast purposes of Him  
Who maketh and unmaketh. Mrityu takes  
Their breath. She slays not; of themselves they die.  
The gentle Spirit with the staff in hand  
Strikes none, but succours all. Therefore the wise,  
Knowing that such is Brahma's will, and good,  
Never lament their dead; grieve thou no more!

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And when the holy Narada made end,  
(Vyāsa said,) this King Akampana  
Shed no more tears, but spake unto the Saint:  
"Lo! now my woe is gone, my heart is healed!  
Oh! wisest of all Rishis, I have peace;  
I thank thee for the blessing of such lore;  
I clasp thy feet." Therewith Narada went

To Nandana, leaving him comforted.  
Son of the Pandavas, be patient too !  
Thy prince, thy gallant Abhimanyu,  
Fell like a lord of men, and hath his meed  
In Swarga with the blessed. Rise thou up,  
Quit grief, and take thy weapons, and renew  
The battle with thy brothers on the plain.

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*Whoso reads and whoso hears,  
This fair story of old years,  
Well and wisely gives his pains ;  
Since thereby his spirit gains  
Piety and peace and bliss ;  
Nay, and heavenward leadeth this ;  
And, on earth, its wisdom brings  
Wealth and health and happy things.*



## THE NIGHT OF SLAUGHTER.

From the *Sauptika Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*.



*To Narayen, Best of Lords, be glory given,  
To great Saraswati, the Queen in Heaven ;  
Unto Vyāsa, too, be paid his meed,  
So shall this story worthily proceed.*

"**T**HOSE vanquished warriors then," Sanjaya said,  
" Fled southwards ; and, near sunset, past the tents,  
Unyoked ; abiding close in fear and rage.  
There was a wood beyond the camp,—untrod,  
Quiet,—and in its leafy harbour lay  
The Princes, some among them bleeding still  
From spear and arrow-gashes ; all sore-spent,

Fetching faint breath, and fighting o'er again  
In thought that battle. But there came the noise  
Of Pandavas pursuing,—fierce and loud  
Outcries of victory,—whereat those chiefs  
Sullenly rose, and yoked their steeds again,  
Driving due east; and eastward still they drove  
Under the night, till drouth and desperate toil  
Stayed horse and man; then took they lair again,  
The panting horses, and the Warriors, wroth  
With chilled wounds, and the death-stroke of their  
King.

“Now were they come, my Prince,” Sanjaya said,  
“Unto a jungle thick with stems, whereon  
The tangled creepers coiled; here entered they—  
Watering their horses at a stream—and pushed  
Deep in the thicket. Many a beast and bird  
Sprang startled at their feet; the long grass stirred  
With serpents creeping off; the woodland flowers  
Shook where the peafowl hid, and, where frogs plunged,  
The swamp rocked all its reeds and lotus-buds.  
A banian-tree, with countless dropping boughs

Earth-rooted, spied they, and beneath its aisles  
A pool; hereby they stayed, tethering their steeds;  
And dipping water, made the evening prayer.

“ But when the ‘ Day-maker ’ sank in the west  
And Night descended—gentle, soothing Night,  
Who comforts all, with silver splendour decked  
Of stars and constellations, and soft folds  
Of velvet darkness drawn—then those wild things  
Which roam in darkness woke, wandering afoot  
Under the gloom. Horrid the forest grew  
With roar, and yelp, and yell, around that place  
Where Kripa, Kritavarman, and the son  
Of Drona lay, beneath the banian-tree,  
Full many a piteous passage instancing  
In their lost battle-day of dreadful blood;  
Till sleep fell heavy on the wearied lids  
Of Bhoja’s child and Kripa. Then these Lords—  
To princely life and silken couches used—  
Sought on the bare earth slumber, spent and sad,  
As houseless outcasts lodge.

“But, O my King!

There came no sleep to Drona's angry son,  
Great Aswatthâman. As a snake lies coiled  
And hisses, breathing, so his panting breath  
Hissed rage and hatred round him, while he lay,  
Chin uppermost, arm-pillowed, with fierce eyes  
Roving the wood, and seeing sightlessly.  
Thus chanced it that his wandering glances turned  
Into the fig-tree's shadows, where there perched  
A thousand crows, thick-roosting, on its limbs;  
Some nested, some on branchlets, deep asleep,  
Heads under wings—all fearless; nor, O Prince!  
Had Aswatthâman more than marked the birds,  
When, lo! there fell out of the velvet night,  
Silent and terrible, an eagle-owl,  
With wide, soft, deadly, dusky wings, and eyes  
Flame-coloured, and long claws, and dreadful beak;  
Like a winged sprite, or great Garood himself.  
Offspring of Bhârata! it lighted there  
Upon the banian's bough; hooted, but low,  
The fury smothering in its throat;—then fell  
With murderous beak and claws upon those crows,

Rending the wings from this, the legs from that,  
From some the heads, of some ripping the crops;  
Till, tens and scores, the fowl rained down to earth  
Bloody and plucked, and all the ground waxed black  
With piled crow-carcases; whilst the great owl  
Hooted for joy of vengeance, and again  
Spread the wide, deadly, dusky wings.

“Up sprang

The son of Drona: ‘Lo! this owl,’ quoth he,  
‘Teacheth me wisdom; lo! one slayeth so  
Insolent foes asleep. The Pandu Lords  
Are all too strong in arms by day to kill;  
They triumph, being many. Yet I swore  
Before the King, my Father, I would “kill”  
And “kill”—even as a foolish fly should swear  
To quench a flame. It scorched, and I shall die  
If I dare open battle; but by art  
Men vanquish fortune and the mightiest odds.  
If there be two ways to a wise man’s wish,  
Yet only one way sure, he taketh this;  
And if it be an evil way, condemned



For Brahmans, yet the Kshattriya may do  
What vengeance bids against his foes. Our foes,  
The Pandavas, are furious, treacherous, base,  
Halting at nothing; and how say the wise  
In holy Shasters?—"Wounded, wearied, fed,  
Or fasting; sleeping, waking, setting forth,  
Or new arriving; slay thine enemies;"  
And so again, "At midnight when they sleep,  
Dawn when they watch not; noon if leaders fall;  
Eve, should they scatter; all the times and hours  
Are times and hours fitted for killing foes."

"So did the son of Drona steel his soul  
To break upon the sleeping Pandu chiefs  
And slay them in the darkness. Being set  
On this unlordly deed, and clear in scheme,  
He from their slumbers roused the warriors twain,  
Kripa and Kritavarman."

## THE GREAT JOURNEY

[From the *Mahaprasthānika Parva* of the *Mahabharāta*.]



*To Narayen, Lord of lords, be glory given,  
To sweet Saraswati, the Queen in Heaven,  
To great Vyāsa, eke, pay reverence due,  
So shall this story its high course pursue.*

THEN Janmejaya prayed : "Thou Singer, say,  
What wrought the princes of the Pandavas  
On tidings of the battle so ensued,  
And Krishna, gone on high ?"

Answered the Sage :

"On tidings of the wreck of Vrishni's race,  
King Yudhishthira of the Pandavas

Was minded to be done with earthly things,  
And to Arjuna spake: 'O noble Prince,  
Time endeth all; we linger, noose on neck,  
Till the last day tightens the line, and kills.  
Let us go forth to die, being yet alive.'  
And Kunti's son, the great Arjuna, said:  
'Let us go forth to die!—Time slayeth all;  
We will find Death, who seeketh other men.'  
And Bhimasena, hearing, answered: 'Yea!  
We will find Death!' and Sahadev cried: 'Yea!  
And his twin brother Nakula:' whereat  
The princes set their faces for the Mount.

"But Yudhishtira—ere he left his realm,  
To seek high ending—summoned Yuyutsu,  
Surnamed of fights, and set him over all,  
Regent, to rule in Parikshita's name  
Nearest the throne; and Parikshita king  
He crowned, and unto old Subhadra said:  
'This, thy son's son, shall wear the Kuru crown,  
And Yadu's offspring, Vajra, shall be first  
In Yadu's house. Bring up the little prince

Here in our Hastinpur, but Vajra keep  
At Indraprasth; and let it be thy last  
Of virtuous works to guard the lads, and guide.'

"So ordering ere he went, the righteous king  
Made offering of white water, heedfully,  
To Vasudev, to Rama, and the rest,—  
All funeral rites performing; next he spread  
A funeral feast, whereat there sate as guests  
Narada, Dwaipayana, Bharadwaj,  
And Markandeya, rich in saintly years,  
And Tajnavalkya, Hari, and the priests.  
Those holy ones he fed with dainty meats  
In kingliest wise, naming the name of Him  
Who bears the bow; and—that it should be well  
For him and his—gave to the Brahmanas  
Jewels of gold and silver, lakhs on lakhs,  
Fair broidered cloths, gardens and villages,  
Chariots and steeds and slaves.

"Which being done,—

O Best of Bhârat's line!—he bowed him low

Before his Gura's feet,—at Kripa's feet,  
That sage all honoured,—saying, 'Take my prince;  
Teach Parikshita as thou taughtest me;  
For hearken, ministers and men of war!  
Fixed is my mind to quit all earthly state.'  
Full sore of heart were they, and sore the folk  
To hear such speech, and bitter spread the word  
Through town and country, that the king would go;  
And all the people cried, 'Stay with us, Lord!'  
But Yudhishthira knew the time was come,  
Knew that life passes and that virtue lasts,  
And put aside their love.

" So—with farewells

Tenderly took of lieges and of lords—  
Girt he for travel, with his princely kin,  
Great Yudhishthira, Dharma's royal son.  
Crest-gem and belt and ornaments he stripped  
From off his body, and for broidered robe  
A rough dress donned, woven of jungle-bark;  
And what he did—O Lord of men!—so did  
Arjuna, Bhima, and the twin-born pair,



Nakula with Sahadev, and she—in grace  
The peerless—Draupadi. Lastly these six,  
Thou son of Bhârata! in solemn form  
Made the high sacrifice of Naishtiki,  
Quenching their flames in water at the close;  
And so set forth, 'midst wailing of all folk  
And tears of women, weeping most to see  
The Princess Draupadî—that lovely prize  
Of the great gaming, Draupadî the Bright—  
Journeying afoot; but she and all the Five  
Rejoiced, because their way lay heavenwards,

“Seven were they, setting forth,—princess and king,  
The king's four brothers, and a faithful dog.  
Those left Hastinapur; but many a man,  
And all the palace household, followed them  
The first sad stage; and, oftentimes prayed to part,  
Put parting off for love and pity, still  
Sighing ‘A little farther!’—till day waned;  
Then one by one they turned, and Kripa said,  
Let all turn back, Yuyutsu! These must go.’  
So came they homewards, but the Snake-King's child,

Ulûpi, leapt in Ganges, losing them ;  
And Chitrânâgad with her people went  
Mournful to Munipoor, whilst the three queens  
Brought Parikshita in.

“ Thus wended they,  
Pandu's five sons and loveliest Draupadî,  
Tasting no meat, and journeying due east ;  
On righteousness their high hearts bent, to heaven  
Their souls assigned ; and steadfast trode their feet,  
By faith upborne, past nullah, ran, and wood,  
River and jheel and plain. King Yudhishtir  
Walked foremost, Bhîma followed, after him  
Arjuna, and the twin-born brethren next,  
Nakula with Sahadev ; in whose still steps—  
O best of Bhârat's offspring !—Draupadî,  
That gem of women, paced ; with soft, dark face,—  
Beautiful, wonderful !—and lustrous eyes,  
Clear-lined like lotus-petals ; last the dog,  
Following the Pandavas.

“ At length they reach  
The far Lauchityan Sea, which foameth white

Under Udayachâla's ridge.—Know ye  
That all this while Nakula had not ceased  
Bearing the holy bow, named Gandiva,  
And jewelled quiver, ever filled with shafts  
Though one should shoot a thousand thousand times.  
Here—broad across their path—the heroes see  
Agni, the god. As though a mighty hill  
Took form of front and breast and limb, he spake.  
Seven streams of shining splendour rayed his brow,  
While the dread voice said: 'I am Agni, chiefs!  
O sons of Pandu, I am Agni! Hail!  
O long-armed Yudhishtira, blameless king,—  
O warlike Bhîma,—O Arjuna, wise,—  
O brothers twin-born from a womb divine,—  
Hear! I am Agni, who consumed the wood  
By will of Narayan for Arjuna's sake.  
Let this your brother give Gandiva back,—  
The matchless bow! the use for it is o'er.  
That gem-ringed battle discus which he whirled  
Cometh again to Krishna in his hand  
For avatars to be; but need is none  
Henceforth of this most excellent bright bow,

Gandiva, which I brought for Partha's aid  
From high Varuna. Let it be returned.  
Cast it herein !'

“ And all the princes said,  
‘ Cast it, dear brother !’ So Arjuna threw  
Into that sea the quiver ever-filled,  
And glittering bow. Then led by Agni's light,  
Unto the south they turned, and so south-west,  
And afterwards right west, until they saw  
Dwaraka, washed and bounded by a main  
Loud-thundering on its shores ; and here—O  
Best !—

Vanished the God ; while yet those heroes walked,  
Now to the north-west bending, where long coasts  
Shut in the sea of salt, now to the north,  
Accomplishing all quarters, journeyed they ;  
The earth their altar of high sacrifice,  
Which these most patient feet did pace around,  
Till Meru rose.

“ At last it rose ! These Six,  
Their senses subjugate, their spirits pure,

Wending alone, came into sight—far off  
In the eastern sky—of awful Himavan;  
And, midway in the peaks of Himavan,  
Meru, the Mountain of all mountains, rose,  
Whose head is Heaven; and under Himavan  
Glared a wide waste of sand, dreadful as death,

“Then, as they hastened o’er the deadly waste,  
Aiming for Meru, having thoughts at soul  
Infinite, eager,—lo! Draupadi reeled,  
With faltering heart and feet; and Bhîma turned,  
Gazing upon her; and that hero spake  
To Yudhishtira: ‘Master, Brother, King!  
Why doth she fail? For never all her life  
Wrought our sweet lady one thing wrong, I think.  
Thou knowest, make us know, why hath she failed?’

“Then Yudhishtira answered: ‘Yea, one thing.  
She loved our brother better than all else,—  
Better than heaven: that was her tender sin,  
Fault of a faultless soul; she pays for that.’

“So spake the monarch, turning not his eyes,



Though Draupadī lay dead—striding straight on  
For Meru, heart-full of the things of heaven,  
Perfect and firm. But yet a little space,  
And Sahadev fell down, which Bhīma seeing,  
Cried once again: ‘O King, great Madri’s son  
Stumbles and sinks. Why hath he sunk?—so true,  
So brave and steadfast, and so free from pride!’

“‘He was not free,’ with countenance still fixed,  
Quoth Yudhishtira; ‘he was true and fast  
And wise, yet wisdom made him proud; he hid  
One little hurt of soul, but now it kills.’

“So saying, he strode on—Kuntī’s strong son—  
And Bhīma, and Arjuna followed him,  
And Nakula, and the hound; leaving behind  
Sahadev in the sands. But Nakula,  
Weakened and grieved to see Sahadev fall—  
His loved twin-brother—lagged and stayed; and next  
Prone on his face he fell, that noble face  
Which had no match for beauty in the land,—  
Glorious and godlike Nakula! Then sighed

Bhíma anew : ‘ Brother and Lord ! the man  
Who never erred from virtue, never broke  
Our fellowship, and never in the world  
Was matched for goodly perfectness of form  
Or gracious feature,—Nakula has fallen ! ’

“ But Yudhishtira, holding fixed his eyes,—  
That changeless, faithful, all-wise king,—replied :  
‘ Yea, but he erred. The godlike form he wore  
Beguiled him to believe none like to him,  
And he alone desirable, and things  
Unlovely to be slighted. Self-love slays  
Our noble brother. Bhíma, follow ! Each  
Pays what his debt was.’

“ Which Arjuna heard,  
Weeping to see them fall ; and that stout son  
Of Pandu, that destroyer of his foes,  
That prince, who drove through crimson waves of war,  
In old days, with his chariot-steeds of milk,  
He, the arch-hero, sank ! Beholding this,—  
The yielding of that soul unconquerable,

Fearless, divine, from Sakra's self derived,  
Arjuna's,—Bhíma cried aloud : ' O king !  
This man was surely perfect. Never once,  
Not even in slumber when the lips are loosed,  
Spake he one word that was not true as truth.  
Ah ! heart of gold, why art thou broke ? O King !  
Whence falleth he ? '

“ And Yudhishtira said,  
Not pausing : ' Once he lied, a lordly lie !  
He bragged—our brother—that a single day  
Should see him utterly consume, alone,  
All those his enemies,—which could not be.  
Yet from a great heart sprang the unmeasured speech.  
Howbeit, a finished hero should not shame  
Himself in such wise, nor his enemy,  
If he will faultless fight and blameless die :  
This was Arjuna's sin. Follow thou me ! '

“ So the king still went on. But Bhíma next  
Fainted, and stayed upon the way, and sank ;  
Yet, sinking cried, behind the steadfast prince :

' Ah ! brother, see ! I die ! Look upon me,  
Thy well-belovèd ! Wherefore falter I,  
Who strove to stand ? '

" And Yudhishtira said :

' More than was well the goodly things of earth  
Pleased thee, my pleasant brother ! Light the offence,  
And large thy virtue ; but the o'er-fed flesh  
Plumed itself over spirit. Pritha's son,  
For this thou failest, who so near didst gain.'

" Thenceforth alone the long-armed monarch strode  
Not looking back,—nay ! not for Bhîma's sake,—  
But walking with his face set for the Mount :  
And the hound followed him,—only the hound.

" After the deathly sands, the Mount ! and lo !  
Sakra shone forth,—the God, filling the earth  
And heavens with thunder of his chariot-wheels.  
' Ascend,' he said, ' with me, Pritha's great son !'  
But Yudhishtira answered, sore at heart  
For those his kinsfolk, fallen on the way :

'O Thousand-eyed, O Lord of all the Gods,  
Give that my brothers come with me, who fell!  
Not without them is Swarga sweet to me.  
She too, the dear and kind and queenly,—she  
Whose perfect virtue Paradise must crown,—  
Grant her to come with us! Dost thou grant this?'

"The God replied: 'In heaven thou shalt see  
Thy kinsmen and the queen—these will attain—  
With Krishna. Grieve no longer for thy dead,  
Thou chief of men! their mortal covering stripped,  
They have their places; but to thee the gods  
Allot an unknown grace: thou shalt go up  
Living and in thy form to the immortal homes.'

"But the king answered: 'O thou Wisest One,  
Who know'st what was, and is, and is to be,  
Still one more grace! This hound hath ate with me,  
Followed me, loved me: must I leave him now?'

"'Monarch,' spake Indra, 'thou art now as We,—  
Deathless, divine; thou art become a god;  
Glory and power and gifts celestial,



And all the joys of heaven are thine for aye :  
What hath a beast with these? Leave here thy hound.'

"Yet Yudhishthira answered: 'O Most High,  
O Thousand-eyed and Wisest! can it be  
That one exalted should seem pitiless?  
Nay, let me lose such glory: for its sake  
I would not leave one living thing I loved.'

"Then sternly Indra spake: 'He is unclean,  
And into Swarga such shall enter not.  
The Krodhavasha's hand destroys the fruits  
Of sacrifice, if dogs defile the fire.  
Bethink thee, Dharmaraj, quit now this beast!  
That which is seemly is not hard of heart."

"Still he replied: 'Tis written that to spurn  
A suppliant equals in offence to slay  
A twice-born; wherefore, not for Swarga's bliss  
Quit I, Mahendra, this poor clinging dog,—  
So without any hope or friend save me,  
So wistful, fawning for my faithfulness,  
So agonised to die, unless I help  
Who among men was called steadfast and just.'

"Quoth Indra: 'Nay! the altar-flame is foul  
 Where a dog passeth; angry angels sweep  
 The ascending smoke aside, and all the fruits  
 Of offering, and the merit of the prayer  
 Of him whom a hound toucheth. Leave it here!  
 He that will enter heaven must enter pure.  
 Why didst thou quit thy brethren on the way,  
 Quit Krishna, quit the dear-loved Draupadí,  
 Attaining, firm and glorious to this Mount  
 Through perfect deeds, to linger for a brute?  
 Hath Yudhishtira vanquished self, to melt  
 With one poor passion at the door of bliss?  
 Stay'st thou for this, who didst not stay for  
     them,—  
 Draupadí, Bhíma?'

"But the king yet spake:  
 'Tis known that none can hurt or help the dead.  
 They, the delightful ones, who sank and died,  
 Following my footsteps, could not live again  
 Though I had turned,—therefore I did not turn;  
 But could help profit, I had turned to help.

There be four sins, O Sakra, grievous sins :  
The first is making suppliants despair,  
The second is to slay a nursing wife,  
The third is spoiling Brahmans' goods by force,  
The fourth is injuring an ancient friend.  
These four I deem not direr than the sin,  
If one, in coming forth from woe to weal,  
Abandon any meanest comrade then.'

" Straight as he spake, brightly great Indra smiled ;  
Vanished the hound ;—and in its stead stood there  
The Lord of Death and Justice, Dharma's self !  
Sweet were the words which fell from those dread lips,  
Precious the lovely praise : ' O thou true king !  
Thou that dost bring to harvest the good seed  
Of Pandu's righteousness ; thou that hast ruth  
As he before, on all which lives !—O Son,  
I tried thee in the Dwaita wood, what time  
The Yaksha smote them, bringing water ; then  
Thou prayedst for Nakula's life—tender and just—  
Not Bhîma's nor Arjuna's, true to both,  
To Madri as to Kuntî, to both queens.

Hear thou my word ! Because thou didst not mount  
This car divine, lest the poor hound be shent  
Who looked to thee, lo ! there is none in heaven  
Shall sit above thee, King !—Bhārata's son,  
Enter thou now to the eternal joys,  
Living and in thy form. Justice and Love  
Welcome thee, Monarch ! thou shalt throne with us !'

“ Thereat those mightiest Gods, in glorious train,  
Mahendra, Dharma,—with bright retinue  
Of Maruts, Saints, Aswin-Kumāras, Nats,  
Spirits and Angels,—bore the king aloft,  
The thundering chariot first, and after it  
Those airy-moving Presences. Serene,  
Clad in great glory, potent, wonderful,  
They glide at will ; at will they know and see ;  
At wish their wills are wrought ; for these are pure,  
Passionless, hallowed, perfect, free of earth,  
In such celestial midst the Pandu king  
Soared upward ; and a sweet light filled the sky  
And fell on earth, cast by his face and form,  
Transfigured as he rose ; and there was heard

The voice of Narad,—it is he who sings,  
Sitting in heaven, the deeds that good men do  
In all the quarters,—Narad, chief of bards,  
Narad the wise, who laudeth purity,—  
So cried he : 'Thou art risen, unmatched king,  
Whose greatness is above all royal saints.  
Hail, son of Pandu ! like to thee is none  
Now or before among the sons of men,  
Whose fame hath filled the three wide worlds, who com'st  
Bearing thy mortal body, which doth shine  
With radiance as a god's.'

"The glad king heard  
Narad's loud praise ; he saw the immortal gods,—  
Dharma, Mahendra ; and dead chiefs and saints,  
Known upon earth, in blessed heaven he saw ;  
But only those. 'I do desire,' he said,  
'That region, be it of the Blest as this,  
Or of the Sorrowful some otherwhere,  
Where my dear brothers are, and Draupadi.  
I cannot stay elsewhere ! I see them not !'

"Then answer made Purandarâ, the God :



'O thou compassionate and noblest One!  
 Rest in the pleasures which thy deeds have gained.  
 How, being as are the Gods, canst thou live bound  
 By mortal chains? Thou art become of Us,  
 Who live above hatred and love, in bliss  
 Pinnacled, safe, supreme. Son of thy race,  
 Thy brothers cannot reach where thou hast climbed!  
 Most glorious lord of men, let not thy peace  
 Be touched by stir of earth! Look! this is Heaven.  
 See where the saints sit, and the happy souls,  
 Siddhas and angels, and the gods who live  
 For ever and for ever.'

" 'King of gods,'

Spake Yudhishtira, 'but I will not live  
 A little space without those souls I loved.  
 O Slayer of the demons! let me go  
 Where Bhima and my brothers are, and she,  
 My Draupadi, the princess with the face  
 Softer and darker than the Vrihat-leaf,  
 And soul as sweet as are its odours. Lo!  
 Where they have gone, there will I surely go.' "

## THE ENTRY INTO HEAVEN.

[From the *Swargārohana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*.]



*To Narayen, Lord of lords, be glory given,  
To Queen Saraswati be praise in heaven ;  
Unto Vyāsa pay the reverence due,—  
So may this story its high course pursue.*

THEN Janmejaya said: "I am fain to learn  
How it befell with my great forefathers,  
The Pandu chiefs and Dhritarashtra's sons,  
Being to heaven ascended. If thou know'st,—  
And thou know'st all, whom wise Vyāsa taught,—  
Tell me, how fared it with those mighty souls?"  
Answered the sage: "Hear of thy forefathers—

Great Yudhishthira and the Pandu lords—  
How it befell. When thus the blameless king  
Was entered into heaven, there he beheld  
Duryodhana, his foe, throned as a god  
Amid the gods; splendidly sate that prince,  
Peaceful and proud, the radiance of his brows  
Far-shining like the sun's; and round him thronged  
Spirits of light, with Sádhyas,—companies  
Goodly to see. But when the king beheld  
Duryodhana in bliss, and not his own,—  
Not Draupadí, not Bhíma, nor the rest,—  
With quick-averted face and angry eyes  
The monarch spake: 'Keep heaven for such as these,  
If these come here! I do not wish to dwell  
Where he is, whom I hated rightfully,  
Being a covetous and witless prince,  
Whose deed it was that in wild fields of war  
Brothers and friends by mutual slaughter fell,  
While our swords smote, sharpened so wrathfully  
By all those wrongs borne wandering in the woods:  
But Draupadí's the deepest wrong, for he—  
He who sits there—haled her before the court,

Seizing that sweet and virtuous lady—he!—  
With grievous hand wound in her tresses. Gods,  
I cannot look upon him! Sith 'tis so,  
Where are my brothers? Thither will I go!

“Smiling, bright Narada, the Sage, replied:  
‘Speak thou not rashly! Say not this, O King!  
Those who come here lay enmities aside.  
O Yudhishtira, long-armed monarch, hear!  
Duryodhana is cleansed of sin; he sits  
Worshipful as the saints, worshipped by saints  
And kings who lived and died in virtue’s path,  
Attaining to the joys which heroes gain  
Who yield their breath in battle. Even so  
He that did wrong thee, knowing not thy worth,  
Hath won before thee hither, raised to bliss  
For lordliness, and valour free of fear.  
Ah, well-belovèd Prince! ponder thou not  
The memory of that gaming, nor the griefs  
Of Draupadi, nor any vanished hurt  
Wrought in the passing shows of life by craft  
Or wasteful war. Throne happy at the side

Of this thy happy foeman,—wiser now ;  
For here is Paradise, thou chief of men !  
And in its holy air hatreds are dead.'

" Thus by such lips addressed, the Pandu king  
Answered uncomforted : ' Duryodhana,  
If he attains, attains ; yet not the less  
Evil he lived and ill he died,—a heart  
Impious and harmful, bringing woes to all,  
To friends and foes. His was the crime which cost  
Our land its warriors, horses, elephants ;  
His the black sin that set us in the field,  
Burning for rightful vengeance. Ye are gods,  
And just ; and ye have granted heaven to him :  
Show me the regions, therefore, where they dwell,  
My brothers, those, the noble-souled, the strong,  
Who kept the sacred laws, who swerved no step  
From virtue's path, who spake the truth, and lived  
Foremost of warriors. Where is Kuntî's son,  
The hero-hearted Karna ? Where are gone  
Sátyaki, Dhrishtadyumna, with their sons ?  
And where those famous chiefs who fought for me,



Dying a splendid death ? I see them not.  
O Narada, I see them not ! No King  
Draupada ! no Virata ! no glad face  
Of Dhrishtaketu ! no Shikandina,  
Prince of Panchála, nor his princely boys !  
Nor Abhimanyu the unconquerable !  
President Gods of heaven ! I see not here  
Radha's bright son, nor Yudhamanyu,  
Nor Uttamanjaso, his brother dear !  
Where are those noble Maharashtra lords,  
Rajas and Rajpoots, slain for love of me ?  
Dwell they in glory elsewhere, not yet seen ?  
If they be here, high Gods ! and those with them  
For whose sweet sakes I lived, here will I live,  
Meek-hearted ; but if such be not adjudged  
Worthy, I am not worthy, nor my soul  
Willing to rest without them. Ah ! I burn,  
Now in glad heaven, with grief, bethinking me  
Of those my mother's words, what time I poured  
Death-water for my dead at Kurkshetra,—  
" Pour for Prince Karna, son ! " but I wist not  
His feet were as my mother's feet, his blood

Her blood, my blood. O Gods! I did not know,—  
Albeit Sakra's self had failed to break  
Our battle, where *he* stood. I crave to see  
Surya's child, that glorious chief who fell  
By Saryasáchi's hand, unknown of me;  
And Bhíma! ah, my Bhíma! dearer far  
Than life to me; Arjuna, like a god;  
Nakula and Sahadev, twin lords of war,  
With tenderest Draupadí! Show me those souls!  
I cannot tarry where I have them not.  
Bliss is not blissful, just and mighty Ones!  
Save if I rest beside them. Heaven is there  
Where Love and Faith make heaven. Let me go!

“And answer made the hearkening heavenly Ones:  
‘Go, if it seemeth good to thee, dear son!  
The King of gods commands we do thy will.’

“So saying [the Sage went on] Dharma's own voice  
Gave ordinance, and from the shining bands  
A golden Deva glided, taking hest  
To guide the king there where his kinsmen were.

So wended these, the holy angel first,  
And in his steps the king, close following.  
Together passed they through the gates of pearl,  
Together heard them close; then to the left  
Descending,—by a path evil and dark,  
Hard to be traversed, rugged,—entered they  
The ‘SINNERS’ ROAD.’ The tread of sinful feet  
Matted the thick thorns carpeting its slope;  
The smell of sin hung foul on them; the mire  
About their roots was trampled filth of flesh  
Horrid with rottenness, and splashed with gore  
Curdling in crimson puddles; where there buzzed  
And sucked and settled creatures of the swamp,  
Hideous in wing and sting, gnat-clouds and flies,  
With moths, toads, newts, and snakes red-gulleted,  
And livid, loathsome worms, writhing in slime  
Forth from skull-holes and scalps and tumbled bones.  
A burning forest shut the roadside in  
On either hand, and ’mid its crackling boughs  
Perched ghastly birds, or flapped amongst the flames,—  
Vultures and kites and crows,—with brazen plumes  
And beaks of iron; and these grisly fowl

Screamed to the shrieks of Prets,—lean, famished  
ghosts,  
Featureless, eyeless, having pin-point mouths,  
Hungering, but hard to fill,—all swooping down  
To gorge upon the meat of wicked ones;  
Whereof the limbs disparted, trunks and heads,  
Offal and marrow, littered all the way.  
By such a path the king passed, sore afear'd  
If he had known of fear, for the air stank  
With carrion stench, sickly to breathe; and lo!  
Presently, 'thwart the pathway foamed a flood  
Of boiling waves, rolling down corpses. This  
They crossed, and then the Asipatra wood  
Spread black in sight, whereof the undergrowth  
Was sword-blades, spitting, every blade, some wretch;  
All around poison trees; and next to this,  
Strewn deep with fiery sands, an awful waste,  
Wherethrough the wicked toiled with blistering feet,  
Midst rocks of brass, red hot, which scorched, and pools  
Of bubbling pitch that gulfed them. Last the gorge  
Of Kutashāla Mali,—frightful gate  
Of utmost Hell, with utmost horrors filled.

Deadly and nameless were the plagues seen there ;  
Which when the monarch reached, nigh overborne  
By terrors and the reek of tortured flesh,  
Unto the angel spake he : ' Whither goes  
This hateful road, and where be they I seek,  
Yet find not ? ' Answer made the Heavenly One :  
' Hither, great King, it was commanded me  
To bring thy steps. If thou be'st overborne,  
It is commanded that I lead thee back  
To where the Gods wait. Wilt thou turn and mount ? '

" Then (O thou Son of Bhárat !) Yudhishtir  
Turned heavenward his face, so was he moved  
With horror and the hanging stench, and spent  
By toil of that black travel. But his feet  
Scarce one stride measured, when about the place  
Pitiful accents ran : ' Alas, sweet King !—  
Ah, saintly Lord !—Ah, Thou that hast attained  
Place with the blessed, Pandu's offspring !—pause  
A little while, for love of us who cry !  
Nought can harm *thee* in all this baneful place ;  
But at thy coming there 'gan blow a breeze



Balmy and soothing, bringing us relief.  
O Pritha's son, mightiest of men! we breathe  
Glad breath again to see thee; we have peace  
One moment in our agonies. Stay here  
One moment more, Bhárata's child! Go not,  
Thou Victor of the Kurus! Being here,  
Hell softens and our bitter pains relax.'

"These pleadings, wailing all around the place,  
Heard the King Yudhishtira,—words of woe  
Humble and eager; and compassion seized  
His lordly mind. 'Poor souls unknown!' he sighed,  
And hellwards turned anew; for what those were,  
Whence such beseeching voices, and of whom,  
That son of Pandu wist not,—only wist  
That all the noxious murk was filled with forms,  
Shadowy, in anguish, crying grace of him.  
Wherefore he called aloud, 'Who speaks with me?  
What do ye here, and what things suffer ye?'  
Then from the black depth piteously there came  
Answers of whispered suffering: 'Karna I,  
O King!' and yet another, 'O my Liege,

s

Thy Bhîma speaks !' and then a voice again,  
' I am Arjuna, brother !' and again,  
' Nakula is here and Sahadev !' and last  
A moan of music from the darkness sighed,  
' Draupadi cries to thee !' Thereat broke forth  
The monarch's spirit,—knowing so the sound,  
Of each familiar voice,—' What doom is this ?  
What have my well-belovèd wrought to earn  
Death with the damned, or life loathlier than death  
In Narak's midst ? Hath Karna erred so deep,  
Bhîma, Arjuna, or the glorious twins,  
Or she, the slender-waisted, sweetest, best,  
My princess,—that Duryodhana should sit  
Peaceful in Paradise with all his crew,  
Throned by Mahendra and the shining Gods ?  
How should these fail of bliss, and he attain ?  
What were their sins to his, their splendid faults ?  
For if they slipped, it was in virtue's way,  
Serving good laws, performing holy rites,  
Boundless in gifts, and faithful to the death.  
These be their well-known voices ! Are ye here,  
Souls I loved best ? Dream I, belike, asleep,

Or rave I, maddened with accursèd sights  
And death-reeks of this hellish air ?'

"Thereat

For pity and for pain the king waxed wroth.  
That soul fear could not shake, nor trials tire,  
Burned terrible with tenderness, the while  
His eyes searched all the gloom, his planted feet  
Stood fast in the mid horrors. Well-nigh, then,  
He cursed the gods; well-nigh that steadfast mind  
Broke from its faith in virtue. But he stayed  
Th' indignant passion, softly speaking this  
Unto the angel: 'Go to those thou serv'st;  
Tell them I come not thither. Say I stand  
Here in the throat of hell, and here will bide—  
Nay, if I perish—while my well-belov'd  
Win ease and peace by any pains of mine.'

"Whereupon, nought replied the shining One,  
But straight repaired unto the upper light,  
Where Sákra sate above the gods; and spake  
Before the gods the message of the king."

"Afterward, what befell?" the Prince inquired.

"Afterward, Princely One!" replied the Sage,  
"At hearing and at knowing that high deed  
(Great Yudhishtira braving hell for love),  
The Presences of Paradise uprose,  
Each Splendour in his place,—god Sákra chief;  
Together rose they, and together stepped  
Down from their thrones, treading the nether road  
Where Yudhishtira tarried. Sákra led  
The shining van, and Dharma, Lord of laws,  
Paced glorious next. O Son of Bhārata,  
While that celestial company came down—  
Pure as the white stars sweeping through the sky,  
And brighter than their brilliance—look! hell's shades  
Melted before them; warm gleams drowned the gloom;  
Soft, lovely scenes rolled over the ill sights;  
Peace calmed the cries of torment; in its bed  
The boiling river shrank, quiet and clear;  
The Asipatra Vana—awful wood—  
Blossomed with colours; all those cruel blades,  
And dreadful rocks, and piteous scattered wreck



Of writhing bodies, where the king had passed,  
Vanished as dreams fade. Cool and fragrant went  
A wind before their faces, as these Gods  
Drew radiant to the presence of the king,—  
Maruts; and Vasus eight, who shine and serve  
Round Indra; Rudras: Aswins; and those Six  
Immortal Lords of light beyond our light,  
Th' Adityas; Sādhyas; Siddhas,—those were there,  
With angels, saints, and habitants of heaven,  
Smiling resplendent round the steadfast prince.

“Then spake the God of gods these gracious words  
To Yudhishthira, standing in that place:—  
“King Yudhishthira! O thou long-armed Lord,  
This is enough! All heaven is glad of thee.  
It is enough! Come, thou most blessed one,  
Unto thy peace, well-gained. Lay now aside  
Thy loving wrath, and hear the speech of Heaven.  
It is appointed that all kings see hell.  
The reckonings for the life of men are twain:  
Of each man's righteous deeds a tally true,  
A tally true of each man's evil deeds.



Who hath wrought little right, to him is paid  
A little bliss in Swarga, then the woe  
Which purges; who much right hath wrought, from  
him

The little ill by lighter pains is cleansed,  
And then the joys. Sweet is peace after pain,  
And bitter pain which follows peace: yet they,  
Who sorely sin, taste of the heaven they miss,  
And they that suffer quit their debt at last.  
Lo! we have loved thee, laying hard on thee  
Grievous assaults of soul, and this black road.  
Bethink thee: by a semblance once, dear son!  
Drona thou didst beguile; and once, dear son!  
Semblance of hell hath so thy sin assoiled,  
Which passeth with these shadows. Even thus  
Thy Bhima went a little space t' account,  
Draupadi, Krishna,—all whom thou didst love,  
Never again to lose! Come, First of Men!  
These be delivered and their quittance made.  
Also the princes, son of Bhārata!  
Who fell beside thee fighting, have attained.  
Come thou to see! Karna, whom thou didst mourn,—

That mightiest archer, master in all wars,—  
He hath attained, shining as doth the sun ;  
Come thou and see ! Grieve no more, King of  
Men !

Whose love helped them and thee, and wins its  
meed.

Rajas and Maharajas, warriors, aids,—  
All thine are thine for ever. Krishna waits  
To greet thee coming, 'compained by gods,  
Seated in heaven, from toils and conflicts saved.  
Son ! there is golden fruit of noble deeds,  
Of prayer, alms, sacrifice. The most just Gods  
Keep thee thy place above the highest saints,  
Where thou shalt sit, divine, compassed about  
With royal souls in bliss, as Hari sits ;  
Seeing Mándhâta crowned, and Bhagirath,  
Daushyanti, Bhárata, with all thy line.  
Now therefore wash thee in this holy stream,  
Gunga's pure fount, whereof the bright waves bless  
All the Three Worlds. It will so change thy flesh  
To likeness of th' immortal, thou shalt leave  
Passions and aches and tears behind thee there.'

"And when the awful Sákra thus had said,  
Lo! Dharma spake, — th' embodied Lord of  
Right :

"'Bho! bho! I am well pleased! Hail to thee,  
Chief!

Worthy, and wise, and firm. Thy faith is full,  
Thy virtue, and thy patience, and thy truth,  
And thy self-mastery. Thrice I put thee, King!  
Unto the trial. In the Dwaita wood,  
The day of tempting,—then thou stoodest fast;  
Next, on thy brethren's death and Draupad's,  
When, as a dog, I followed thee, and found  
Thy spirit constant to the meanest friend.  
Here was the third and sorest touchstone, son!  
That thou should'st hear thy brothers cry in hell,  
And yet abide to help them. Pritha's child,  
We love thee! Thou art fortunate and pure,  
Past trials now. Thou art approved, and they  
Thou lov'st have tasted hell only a space,  
Not meriting to suffer more than when  
An evil dream doth come, and Indra's beam

Ends it with radiance—as this vision ends.  
It is appointed that all flesh see death,  
And therefore thou hast borne the passing pangs,  
Briefest for thee, and brief for those of thine,—  
Bhíma the faithful, and the valiant twins  
Nakula and Sahadev, and those great hearts  
Karna, Arjuna, with thy princess dear,  
Draupadí. Come, thou best-belovèd son,  
Blessed of all thy line; bathe in this stream,—  
It is great Gunga, flowing through Three Worlds.'

“ Thus high-accosted, the rejoicing King  
(Thy ancestor, O Liege!) proceeded straight  
Unto that river's brink, which floweth pure  
Through the Three Worlds, mighty, and sweet, and  
praised.

There, being bathed, the body of the King  
Put off its mortal, coming up arrayed  
In grace celestial, washed from soils of sin,  
From passion, pain, and change. So, hand in hand  
With brother-gods, glorious went Yudhishtir,  
Lauded by softest minstrelsy, and songs

Of unknown music, where those heroes stood—  
The princes of the Pandavas, his kin—  
And lotus-eyed and loveliest Draupadi,  
Waiting to greet him, gladdening and glad.

THE END.



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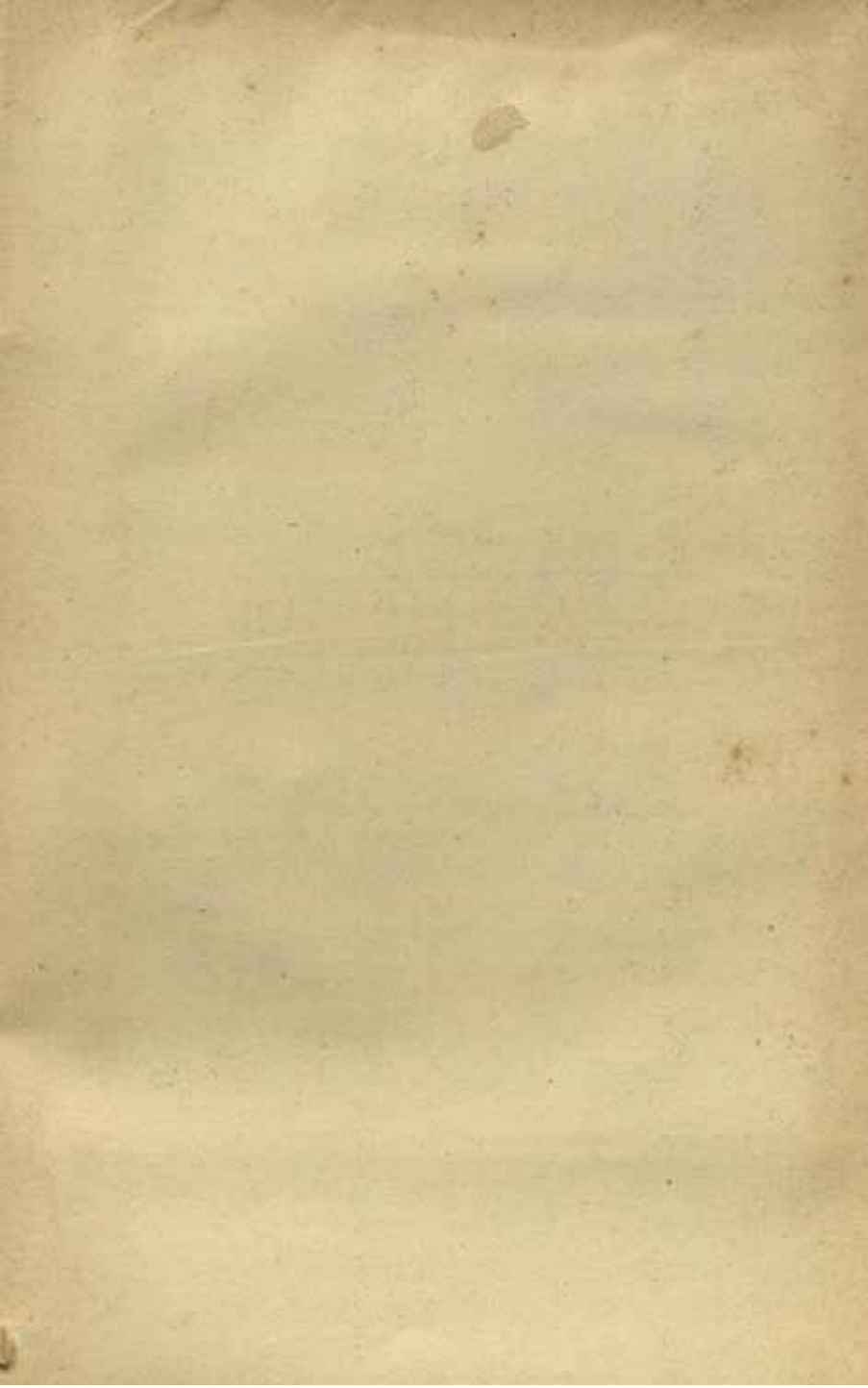
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